

# LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1201.—VOL. XLVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 8, 1886.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[THE STRANGER TOOK IN EVERY FEATURE OF HER FACE, AND SAID, IN A DEEP MUSICAL VOICE, "I TRUST I HAVE NOT ALARMED YOU?"]

## IVA'S QUEST.

### CHAPTER IV.

He had not come!

It may seem a light thing to grieve over, this delay of Lord Ducie's return, this seeming break of his promise; but, then, he was the only relation Gerda had—her very all!

A girl with loving mother and cheerful sisters might have thought but little of the blow, but to her it seemed terrible.

This was her first separation from her father, and his failing to return filled the girl with a dread fear something had happened to him.

No light cause could keep him away from her. An accident might have happened; perhaps at the very moment when she went so joyously to meet him at Netherton station she was already fatherless!

Nurse Brown stood in the hall to greet her master when Gerda drove sadly up to the Chaise.

The oldest of all Lord Ducie's servants, she

would have deemed it a slight to the master she had nursed as a boy not to be foremost to welcome him on his return even from so short an absence; but, alas! the only creature to mount the terrace steps and come slowly down the oaken hall was the slight, girlish-looking descendant of the Ducies, whom, though the nurse dearly loved as the last of the old line, she had never quite forgiven for being born in foreign lands, and not favouring her father.

"And where's the master, Miss Gerda? How is it you've left him behind?"

"He did not come. Oh, nurse!" and there was a sob in Gerda's voice, "he was not there! I think he must be dead!"

"Dead!" cried Nurse Brown, sharply.

"Not a bit of it, my dear. Master Bertram was always a shiftless lad, not fit to be trusted a mile away from home. He's just lost his train, or had his luggage stolen, or something."

Another time Gerda would have smiled at hearing her grave, dignified father described as a "shiftless lad," but now her heart was too heavy.

"He promised to come, nurse."

"Well, he's just been prevented. Sure you're not going to fret your eyes out for that, Miss Gerda? What would you have done if you'd lived in the old coaching days, when it took half a week to get to London?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't," said nurse, authoritatively. "You must just be dressed, and have your dinner as usual, like a proper young lady. Sir James Pierrepont is coming round this evening to see your papa, and he's sure to want a word with you."

Gerda submitted. Her own impulse would have been to shut herself up in her own room, and give way to her grief; but the old woman's simple, commonplace remarks had done much to show her she might be taking needless alarm.

She went upstairs, and put on the pretty evening dress her maid had got out ready for her.

She sat through the long courses of the ceremonious dinner, and felt relieved when it was all over, and she could slip away to the



snuggery, a very pretty room where she and her father usually sat when they were alone.

The snuggery was long and narrow. All its windows—and there were four all together on one side—opened on to the terrace, and at one end there were glass doors leading to the conservatory, and through that a flight of steps communicating with the grounds.

There was nothing in the room too good for use, nothing oppressively grand. It looked just what it was—a place where people could feel at home.

The floor was of polished oak, and bare, save that in the middle was an Eastern rug of many colours.

There was a writing-table in one corner, a work-table in another; many a shelf filled with well-chosen books; a cottage piano, a sofa, and four chairs, all different in size and shape, and each one looking more inviting than the other.

Gerda pulled one—a delicious chintz-covered thing, with lots of soft cushions—to an open window, and sat down.

It was not yet eight o'clock; they were almost at the longest day, and the sun would not set for another hour.

She looked out upon the scene before her, and a strange feeling told her she had never prized her beautiful home half enough.

She loved the Chase dearly—loved it with every fibre of her nature, but she had taken its possession almost as a matter of course. It was her father's—it would be hers; only, as she sat alone on this sweet June evening, did it come to her mind that if the old entail, of which she had heard so much, had not been cut off she would have had no share in the glories of the Chase.

Some distant cousin must have been her father's heir, and, as that father's death, she (Gerda) must have sought another home.

The moments passed. Sir James did not come.

Gerda longed for her kind old friend. She wanted to tell him of her disappointments; she yearned for him to assure her she need not be uneasy, and so restless, and unquiet.

She resolved to go and meet him. Half-an-hour's walk through the grounds, and she would be close to Pierrepont Hall.

Gerda flung a cushion straight over her head, and set out without a word of her intentions. She little knew what a fair picture she formed, her dusky hair in soft waves framed by the vivid colouring of her wrap, her white dress gleaming from the contrast.

On, down the terrace steps, on through the flower-scented ground she walked.

The sun was setting now, making the sky a ruddy splendour, and shining with a fiery glow behind the trees.

Gerda hurried on; she could not stop; she dared not attempt to pass the night without one word of comfort from a more reliable person than the old nurse. Sir James would help her.

There seemed nothing odd or unusual to her in seeking an old friend's counsel. The lateness of the hour never struck her. Had she and her father not often wandered in the grounds until long past ten o'clock?

She gained the chestnut avenue, the boundary between her father's estate and the grounds of Pierrepont Hall.

Sir James and Lord Ducie were such friends that they had caused a gate to be made at the end of this walk, so that they could visit each other without the formal four miles' drive which separated the Chase and the Hall by the high road.

Gerda could see the gate in the distance, when suddenly every pulse in her body seemed to stand still. A mist appeared to come before her eyes.

Was she dreaming? or did she really see the picture in Nurse Brown's room come, as it were, to life, and marching towards her?

She knew the story of the old family feud; knew that her far-removed uncle Rupert had

offended his brother past forgiveness, and perished soon after.

Never a doubt of his death had been expressed to Gerda. She had never heard of the visions which troubled Sir James's peace; had no idea of the mysterious consultation that had taken place only the night of her father's departure.

All she could realise was that here was the counterfeit of Nurse Brown's picture, the original of which had been dead well nigh half a century.

Here, in her father's grounds, stood the presentiment of his ancestor, dressed as when he shook the dust of Netherton from off his feet—not a day older.

It could not be. No human creature could live fifty years and remain unaltered. Even if Rupert Ducie had escaped death he would be an old man, bowed and decrepit.

Gerda buried her face in her hands and trembled, afraid of what she knew not.

The mist, on the contrary, betrayed no manner of surprise. He stopped his walk suddenly, and looked earnestly at the beautiful vision thus presented to his notice. His eyes took in every feature of Gerda's face before, with a courteous movement, he stood aside to let her pass, and said, in a deep musical voice—

"I trust I have not alarmed you?"

But Gerda Ducie had not words to answer him. Although he had spoken—although his words were simple and commonplace—she could not realise that he was aught but a wanderer from the spirit's world.

Gerda was not superstitious naturally, but she had none of the strong-minded incredulity of modern young ladies.

She would have laughed if she had heard of ghosts, but she was not sceptical enough to deny their existence when—as she thought—she actually stood before her.

"You are trembling!" said the intruder, gently. "Will you not at least allow me to see you home?"

"You?" said the girl, with a convulsive shudder. "Do you think I would walk with you?"

His face clouded over. He frowned slightly, then he seemed to recover his good humour.

"I beg your pardon!" he said, simply. "I did not dream of etiquette having penetrated to this retired place, and that you would require an introduction before allowing me to act as your escort."

Gerda started. She was still very pale, but the nervous trembling of her limbs had ceased.

"I begin to think I have been very foolish," she began, quietly; "but I took you for—"

"A burglar?" hazarded the intruder, seeing she was in a dilemma. "Well, perhaps appearances are against me; but I had the permission of Lord Ducie's steward to walk in the grounds of Netherton Chase."

There was nothing for it now but full confession.

"I took you for a ghost!"

"A ghost?"

It was his turn to look bewildered now. A light seemed to break upon him, and he laughed outright.

"I always thought ghosts affected white sheets and long, shadowy garments. I thought they were a transparent spectral sort of race, not with muscular frame and broad shoulders clad in a sailor's uniform?"

"I am very sorry—"

"That I am not a ghost? I assure you I do not regret it in the very least."

"No, I mean I am sorry I was so rude to you!"

"What could have made you take me for a ghost? Do you know I met an old gentleman here an hour ago, and I presumed to speak to him. He treated me even more cavalierly than you did. He took to his feet and fled."

"It must have been Sir James Pierrepont. A tall, old man, very stately, and noble-looking?"

"Exactly. Did he take me for a ghost too?"

"I expect so. He has seen the picture, no doubt. The likeness would strike him too!"

"I begin to see land," said the sailor, brightly. "I have the good or bad fortune to resemble some picture you have seen, and on the strength of the resemblance you pronounce me a ghost?"

"That is it exactly. You see my great uncle has been dead fifty years."

"And I am like him?"

"You might be himself. That is just the cloak he carries in that picture, and the very hat!"

"Probably he was in my profession. Was he a sailor?"

"Yes."

"The hat is explained then, and I think the resemblance can be too!"

"Oh, no."

"I think so—if you are Miss Ducie?"

"Yes; I am Gerda Ducie. The last of the old name."

"Not the last. Do you know, Miss Ducie, I am your kinsman? My grandfather was born at Netherton Chase. His Christian name was Rupert!"

"Then—"

"It must have been a false report you heard of his death. He went abroad, married, and made a large fortune. My father was his only child. I was left an orphan very young, and all I am, or hope to be, I owe to your grandfather!"

"And is he alive?"

The young officer shook his head.

"He has been dead nearly three years. It was his wish that when I returned to England I should visit Netherton, and try to effect a reconciliation with his kindred. He had a very tender heart, and a loving anxiety for my future. He wished me at once to choose England for my home, and to seek the friendship of any left of his name."

"But I thought he hated me?"

"He never hated anyone for an hour. I believe, in consequence of some rash oath, he was pledged to seek no communication with Netherton himself; but it was his dearest wish that I should know and love the old home he so fondly remembered!"

"But why didn't you come to my father? Whatever made you walk here?"

"My grandfather had left me strict injunctions how I was to proceed. He was very kind in his ways. He seemed to think Sir James Pierrepont would recognise me from my resemblance to the family, and act as my introducer. He said if only I frequented the chestnut walk for a while I should be sure to encounter Sir James or my cousin. "Dear old man!" added the lieutenant, fondly. "I am sure he never dreamed they would take me for a ghost!"

"It was very foolish!"

"It was the most natural thing in the world. I ought to have pursued a more formal course, only I didn't like to go against the dear old man's wishes. And then—"

"And then?" asked Gerda. "Do finish your sentence!"

"I rather wanted a sight of my kindred before I made known my identity."

"Why?"

"Some people are very proud," returned the sailor. "My grandfather left me a fortune, but nothing would ever make me set up for a fine gentleman. Some families would despise me as a kind of clod-hopping, country cousin. I drew a great many fancy pictures of my relations, I assure you!"

"Were they right?"

He laughed.

"I expected to see a very fashionable young lady dressed in the latest Paris style, with an extensive fringe and a prevalence of scent. Then I thought Lord Ducie would be a kind of stately bookworm, rarely emerging from his library."



Gerda blushed.

"Papa is the best and dearest father in the world, and everyone likes him; but we do not go very much into society because he has never got over my mother's death. The loss of her has made him grave and thoughtful; but still he never shirks a duty or neglects a friend."

"I see," said the sailor, kindly. "My portrait of him is about as wrong as the one I formed of you."

"I don't think I am fashionable?"

"You looked like the heroine of some old fairy tale suddenly come to life! I never dreamed you were my kinswoman when I accosted you."

A clock chimed ten. Gerda started. These two young people had been talking for more than half an hour.

"You will let me take you home?" pleaded Gerda's cousin. "And, if it is not too late, will you introduce me to your father?"

"I cannot."

"You think he would consider me an intruder?"

"He would welcome you gladly, but he is not at home. Oh! I am in great trouble!" as she recalled her disappointment. "I was going to tell Sir James where I met you."

"Well, you will let me see you there, and if Sir James can be persuaded of my non-ghostlike character will you introduce me to him?"

Lady Pierrepont had gone to bed with a cold; Sir James sat on the verandah smoking a last cigar, when a little hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Gerda! Good gracious! My dear child, however did you get here at this time of night?"

"I wanted to speak to you so badly, and you did not come."

"No," confessed the Baronet, rather sheepishly. "I had every intention of going to the Chase. I assure you, my dear child. I fact, I actually started, but—I was prevented."

"What prevented you?"

"Something I would rather not tell you."

"But I think I know it. You met some one in the chestnut walk; I met him too."

Sir James felt his teeth chatter.

"I wonder you are not scared to death!"

"I was nearly. Then I took courage, and entered with conversation with Mr. Ghost."

"Gerda!"

"Don't be vexed, dear Sir James. It was no ghost at all, but my far-off cousin—old uncle Rupert's grandson."

The sailor had been listening till she reached this point in her narrative; then, as agreed on between the two conspirators, he joined them, and gave Sir James such a hearty hand-grip that the Baronet could never again question his being of substantial flesh and blood. Very, very hearty was the Baronet's welcome, and, as he took the seat offered him, Iva Ducie knew he had gained one loyal, trustworthy friend.

"I shall send a servant over to the Chase, Gerda, to tell them not to expect you," said Sir James. "You must not think of venturing back to-night."

"I must go," she answered. "I could not bear to be away, only I wanted to tell you about papa. You know him so well, Sir James—don't you think it very strange?"

"Very," admitted the Baronet. "But, Gerda, why did you neglect the simplest thing to do? If you had telegraphed to the friends he was staying with they could have wired back whether he had left there or not. In two hours your doubts would have been at rest."

"I did think of it, but I couldn't."

"Anyway, you have written?"

"No."

Sir James looked perplexed.

"I suppose you have heard from your father since he went away?"

"I have heard nothing—not a single word or line. I expected him all yesterday. When he did not come I felt certain he would be

here to-day. Sir James, don't laugh at me, but I have never parted from him before. I counted the hours, nay, the minutes."

Iva Ducie watched her with a strange pain at his heart; the tale seemed too strange and unnatural not to awaken his fears. It seemed to him some dire accident must have befallen Lord Ducie, and if so a heavy weight of sorrow must be Gerda's!

"Do you mean you have heard nothing from him at all since he left you on Wednesday?"

"It was Tuesday when he left me. He went up to London by the night train; he was going further in the morning."

"Where?"

"I have no idea."

"Gerda!"

"I suppose he forgot to tell me," said the girl, simply, "and I never thought to ask him. You see, he hoped to be back on Friday; perhaps he thought letters unnecessary."

"And I was blaming you for not telegraphing, my poor child! Gerda, I don't like this!"

Gerda read blame of her father in the words.

"It was not his fault," she said, promptly. "He was summoned in a great hurry."

"But he had no relations in the world, except one whose existence he did not suspect," glancing at the young sailor. "He was not in business. I can't conceive how he could be required so urgently at a moment's notice."

"It was so."

"I don't like it," Gerda, don't you see, we know nothing of him since Tuesday night. He may have met with an accident; he may be lying senseless in a hospitable ward. Good gracious! he may be in his coffin, child, for all we know!"

Sir James had worked himself up into a pitch of excitement, and he quite forgot the awful shock he was giving Gerda.

"How dare you?" thundered Iva Ducie. "Don't you see you're killing her!"

"My dear child!" and the old man clasped the little, ice-cold hand in his. "I am an old simpleton, a regular idiot; you mustn't think again of what I said. You see I was thoroughly put out with Ducie for giving us such a fright."

"You did not mean to be unkind," said Gerda, with a poor attempt at a smile. "I think I will go home, Sir James."

"Stay with us."

"No. I can bear it better at home, and somehow I feel nearer him there. Sir James, I feel terribly anxious, but I can't believe him dead. He was all I had! Heaven couldn't take him from me."

Alas, alas! Before a year had passed over her head Gerda Ducie knew she could better have borne to mourn over her father's grave than to live on and see the wreck he had made of his life. Had he never returned to Netherton Gerda would have had nothing but happy, loving memories of him.

Iva took up the crimson shawl and wrapped it more closely round the little figure.

"I will take Gerda home, Sir James," he said to the Baronet. "She is right, she will be better there; but I fear she has a terrible time of suspense before her. There is no train into Netherton before Monday morning."

"No train, true; but in such a case Ducie would not spare money. He could come to Mardon Junction and hire a post chaise for the twenty miles beyond. And Iva, my lad, there is one thing we have overlooked. Ducie is the worst hand in the world at making calculations of time and distance; to-morrow's post may bring Gerda the letter he meant her to receive to-day."

This was the most hopeful thing he had said yet; it reduced Gerda's suspense to only about nine hours. She brightened up perceptibly, said good-bye to Sir James, and, putting her little hand confidently in Iva's arm, let him lead her away.

"They make a handsome pair," ruminated the old Baronet, when he had watched them out of sight; "that lad's a chip of the old

block, and would make a good husband for my little friend. If anything has happened to Ducie he'll be the head of the family. It would be a good thing to unite the titles and—Bah! what am I after? Matchmaking, and actually reckoning on poor Bertam's death. I must be a heartless wretch."

Very few words were exchanged between the stranger cousins as they walked back to the Chase, only as Gerda turned to mount the terrace steps Iva took her hand pleadingly.

"I may call to-morrow to ask how you are?"

"I shall be very pleased."

"And keep up your courage; don't think of anything but your father's unmethodical habits and dislike of letter-writing."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," and he stood uncovered as to a princess. "I shall never forget our first meeting, Gerda; I should like us to be friends."

"And I should like it too. I shall never forget your kindness, never while I live."

And then they parted.

I think myself sleep is the most capricious of gifts, as much so to the fall as fortune; but sleep in this instance delighted in coming where her presence was least expected. Gerda had feared a long, restless night; she had fancied herself unable to close her eyes for the thought of her father's danger; instead, worn out by all she had undergone, weary with alternate hopes and fears, her brown head had no sooner touched the pillow than she fell into a deep, unbroken slumber, which lasted long after her usual hour of awakening.

Nurse Barbara had been into the room on tiptoe two or three times, but she could not bear to rouse her child. Her last visit, however found Gerda sitting up in bed, with one hand pressed to her temples, as though to still their throbbing.

"What has happened?" she asked, in a strange, far-off sort of way. "I don't seem able to remember. And is it late, nurse? Surely those are the bells ringing for church."

"Those are the bells ringing, right enough, deary, but you're not going to church this morning. You had a bit of a fright yesterday, and you must just rest yourself to-day."

"I remember now—it was about papa. Oh, nurse! is there any news?"

"The best of all news, Miss Gerda—a letter from my lord himself. It came night two hours ago, but you were in a beautiful sleep then, and I couldn't bring myself to rouse you, dear. I know my lord's writing well, and the moment I caught sight of it I felt sure there was nothing amiss."

She lingered, evidently on the watch for tidings, and Gerda broke the seal hurriedly; as though even yet she did not feel quite reassured.

"MY DARLING CHILD,—I trust you will get this on Saturday in time to prevent any disappointment my not returning might give you. I am very sorry to defer my home-coming, but I am unavoidably detained. I will write and fix a day for my return as soon as business allows. Meanwhile take care of yourself—go to Pierrepont Hall and amuse yourself with your kind friends there.—Your affectionate father, "DUCIE."

It was not a satisfactory letter. Gerda told Nurse Brown her father's return was postponed, and she ought to have received the letter sooner; then as the old woman bustled off to retail the news downstairs Gerda seized the letter and read it again and again. In five minutes she knew it by heart, and then was just as conscious as at her first perusal that it was unsatisfactory.

Gerda had been so much her father's companion that she knew of all the business connected with his estate. The whole was under the management of an admirable steward, and as he had been much surprised at Lord Ducie's sudden journey it was clear he was ignorant of its cause. What business could Lord Ducie have unknown to his daughter and

his steward? Why could he not even name a date for his return? If unable to fix the precise day he might at least have said whether she could expect him that week.

There was not a word of his journey or surroundings, no reference to the people with whom he was staying, and no expression of delight at the thought of their reunion.

"He might have written that to a stranger," said Gerda to herself; then her blood seemed to run cold. She glanced at the top of the letter and saw it had no date. "He could not even trust me with his address."

"Miss Gerda," said Nurse, an hour later, coming into the snugger, where the young heiress was trifling with her breakfast, "here's Sir James Pierrepont—he wants to take you home with him for the rest of the day. He's brought the pony-carriage."

"You must come, child," said Sir James, following close on the heels of his messenger. "I have invited the ghost to meet you at lunch, and he will be awfully disappointed if you refuse. Why, Gerda, how pale you are! Nurse said you were quite easy about your father."

Gerda put Lord Ducie's letter into his hands.

"Well, he's right enough."

"I—I don't like it; he never says he's well, and—and he doesn't seem to want to come back to me."

Sir James laughed outright.

"What a jealous little puss! Why, child, Ducie is noted for short, curt letters. He's not a man to pour out his heart upon a sheet of writing paper. Depend upon it he's counting the time till he can get back to you. No man ever loved a daughter more fondly than he does you."

"I'm very naughty, but—"

"But what? Better tell me, Gerda, or you'll brood yourself into a fever."

"Why doesn't he give me an address? Look, Sir James, not even the name of his hotel!"

"He forgot it. What was the postmark on the envelope?"

"I never looked."

"Look now."

"I can't. I never thought of keeping the envelope, and I let it blow away. I haven't an idea what the postmark was."

"Well, forget about it, and put on your bonnet. Lady Pierrepont says she shall n't let you leave the Hall till your father comes home. She will have it it's bad for you to be alone in this great house, and I'm afraid she's a little shocked you should have got so intimate with the ghost, though he has made a most favourable impression on her."

"I think I should like to stay at the Hall now I know papa is safe. It is lonely here; and oh! Sir James, he gives me no idea when he'll be back."

"I hope he won't hurry," said the kind old Baronet, "if we're to be the gainers by his absence. Now, Gerda, here's your hat and parasol. One of the maids can bring you a box over in the afternoon; we won't wait for any packing now."

Iva Ducie was in the basket-carriage. He shook hands very warmly with his cousin, and congratulated her on her father's safety.

It was a very merry drive. Gerda's pre-arrangements and low spirits vanished in such cheerful company. She was smiling long before they reached the Hall, and saw Lady Pierrepont waiting to welcome her guest.

She dearly loved Gerda, but before the day was out Iva rivalled his cousin in her good graces.

It was my lady who proposed Mr. Ducie should transplant his things from the village inn, and spend the last few days of his leave with them, and the young man accepted the invitation without pressing.

He spoke quite openly of his past life. He had been educated in England, and entered the service of the Union Steamship Company chiefly because it afforded him opportunities of frequent visits to his grandfather, who

enjoyed his well-earned fortune in one of the most thriving towns of Cape Colony.

Independent now of all need to work, Iva clung to his profession from sheer love of the sea.

Through changing ships he had enjoyed more than a month's leave, but this was almost over, and he was due at Southampton in less than a week.

"I don't wonder at you," said Sir James, who dearly loved the sea; "a sailor's life is the freest and happiest in the world."

"I shall settle down some day," said Iva, gravely. "It was my grandfather's wish that I should buy some English homestead, and turn into a landsman. I could give up the sea for that, but nothing can make me into a London fine gentleman. It isn't in me, Sir James."

"I wonder you never thought of the navy."

"My grandfather would not part with me at the early age necessary for that. Oh! Sir James, I wish you could have met again. You never saw such a man as he was. Everyone loved him. When he died the whole place sorrowed."

"Aye, I can believe that. Well, Mr. Iva, when do you propose to quit the sea, and turn into a landsman?"

"Some day."

"And where's the homestead to be?"

"I haven't thought yet."

"Take my advice, boy, and don't buy any property beyond your means. A landed gentleman's life's not worth having if he's many acres and little money."

"That is all decided for me."

"How?"

"My grandfather left fifty thousand pounds to buy an English estate. The money is in the hands of trustees, and though the choice of a property is left to me I fancy they will have a say in the matter. Then I have some property in the funds, so left that I have only the life interest, and am powerless to touch the capital."

"The funds! Safe, but very unremunerative. What does the investment bring you in?"

"Five thousand a-year."

"My dear lad," said Sir James, drily, "you ought to live in London, and go through a season. You'd be quite a hero."

"I don't want to be."

"All the young ladies would smile at such an eligible young man."

"But, you see, I don't want them to smile, Sir James."

"How now! Isn't a wife included in the plan of settling down in England?"

Iva smiled.

"I shall never marry a fashionable young lady, sir. I should like a wife who would care for me, and not mind about what I could offer her."

"She'd be a very innocent person."

"But I like innocent persons. I would rather be unmarried all my life than have a wife and know I owed her to my grandfather's fortune."

This conversation took place after lunch. Lady Pierrepont had taken Gerda away to rest in her own boudoir, so our heroine could not hear the description of her cousin's fortune and opinions of matrimony.

The days passed on. Sir James and Lady Pierrepont were the most easy of chaperones. Perhaps they regarded the far-off cousinship as an excuse for the intimacy they allowed to Iva and Gerda.

The two young people were constantly thrown together, and, in consequence, after a week they knew each other better than they would have done in years of ceremonious acquaintance.

They were fast friends, and if Iva felt a warmer feeling for the fair young chatelaine of the Chase he did it bravely. He would not woo her while her father was still absent, and in ignorance of the existence of old Rupert Ducie's grandson.

His leave was prolonged at his urgent re-

quest, just because he so wished to see his kinsman.

Nothing more had been heard of Lord Ducie. He had never written since the letter which struck so cold a chill upon his daughter. Not knowing his address she could not write and bring his return, could not tell him of her new kinsman, whose friendship did so much to relieve the tedium of his absence.

The last day of Iva's stay at Pierrepont Hall arrived, and still Lord Ducie had not written.

"I wish I could have seen your father," said Iva for about the tenth time.

"It is most annoying; but you will come back. It is not a long voyage, and I know Sir James has given you a general invitation."

"Yes, I shall be in England in two or three months; but I have had so long a leave now I cannot expect much when we are next on shore. I wish I could have seen Lord Ducie."

"I wish you could, but it is only deferred. You will come to Netherton again. You won't forget us quite?"

"I shall never forget you, Gerda. If ever your father looks coldly on our intimacy you won't take back your word? You know you promised we should be friends."

"Friends always, Iva."

"And you will think of me sometimes?"

"Often."

He held her hand a little longer than usual; he looked into her eyes more tenderly even than his wont, and then he was gone.

Gerda felt a strange sadness at her heart, and there seemed a blank at Pierrepont Hall; but the next morning Miss Ducie had plenty to think of. A letter brought over in haste from the Chase informed her her father would return that very day. She was to send the carriage to meet the five o'clock train.

Lord Ducie wrote in hot haste. It was almost a month since he left home, and he told his daughter he longed to see her again; yet even in the hurried note he specially desired her not to meet him at the station, but to receive him alone at Netherton Chase, and the word "alone" was underscored. There was to be a late dinner at seven, and the blue rooms were to be prepared instead of those he occupied in the west wing.

Gerda left Pierrepont Hall directly after breakfast, and carried her father's orders to the housekeeper.

"The blue rooms!" exclaimed that functionary. "Why, they are a lady's; they have not been used since your grandmother's time, Miss Gerda! When she died your grandpapa took the suite Lord Ducie uses now."

"I don't understand it; but papa certainly says so. He mentions it there."

"Can the master be bringing guests, miss?"

"Oh, no," confidently, "papa hates visitors; besides, he will want me all to himself after such a long parting."

Poor child! she little knew that never again would her father be only hers.

She stood on the terrace to welcome her father; but no, the sound of the wheels told her the carriage was going round to the grand porticoed entrance, so Gerda hurried into the hall only just in time. Already Lord Ducie stood on the threshold.

"Papa—papa, how glad I am to have you back again!"

He folded her in his arms, then turned to someone behind him. Gerda started. It was a lady clad in rich sweeping garments, a thick veil over her face.

Was she dreaming? Did she catch the words aright?

"I have not come home alone, Gerda. This is my wife, Lady Ducie, mistress of Netherton Chase."

(To be continued.)

A good name, like good will, is got by many actions and lost by one.



## HILDA'S FORTUNES.

## CHAPTER XLI.

THE morning after her interview with Nadir Ida went to her father's door, and begged he would permit her to enter the room; but Keziah Hepburn was with him, and strongly advised him against complying with the request, so the girl had to go away with the promise that she should see Sir Douglas directly Colonel Fanshawe thought there was no further danger of infection.

After this Ida put on her walking clothes, and proceeded boldly through the hall, where, as it happened, she encountered the officer.

"Where are you going?" he asked, standing in her path, so as to prevent her passing.

"For a walk. I want some fresh air."

"Allow me to accompany you," he observed, suavely. "I do not think it wise for young ladies to go out alone."

"But I wish to be alone!"

"Very likely. Your sex often wishes for things that are not good for them."

He reached down his hat as he spoke, and took up a coat lined with sealskin, as if he intended putting it on.

Ida saw there was no chance of being allowed to go out by herself, and, in accordance with a resolve she had made of not staying in his presence a minute longer than she could help, she quietly turned round, and went upstairs again.

Nadir would be surprised that she had not kept her appointment, but he would, doubtless, guess the reason which had prevented her, and would devise some means of communicating with her later on.

Already she found herself thinking of the Hindoo with a certain amount of confidence, as of one who was both ready and willing to help her.

When luncheon time came she did not go down, but requested a few biscuits might be brought up to her. This was done, but later on, when dinner was announced, Colonel Fanshawe sent a peremptory message requesting her presence, and utterly refused to allow a plate to be sent to the boudoir.

Ida was a practical girl, and knew quite well that no good would come from starving herself. She therefore went to the dining-room with as good a grace as she could assume; for although she was far from being in her former robust health she had not entirely lost her appetite.

The meal was a silent one, for neither she or her host were inclined to talk. Ever and anon the latter stole a glance at her, but she bent her eyes on the cloth, and resolutely declined raising them.

It was easy for him to see that she was in some way excited; each little sound seemed to make her on the alert, as if she were expecting something unusual to happen; and every time he addressed her she started violently, as though her nerves were pulled to their finest tension.

When dessert was put on the table, and the servants withdrew, she rose.

"If you will excuse me I will return to my room," she said, with a slight inclination of her head, as he got up to open the door for her.

"I will come with you. I have ordered coffee to be taken up to the boudoir instead of being served here," he replied.

Ida paused on the threshold. If, as she deemed probable, Nadir attempted any communication with her this evening it would never do to have Fanshawe present.

"I should be glad if you would let me be alone for a few hours," she cried, a tremor shaking her usually steady voice. "I have some letters to write, which are important."

"And I have some matters to talk over that are far more important," he answered, coolly. "You must defer writing your letters until another opportunity."

Further remonstrance or resistance would

be useless, as she well knew, so she went to the boudoir without saying a word, and he followed, with a determined frown on his dark face.

He had drunk a good deal of wine at dinner, and although it had not rendered him in the least degree less master of himself than usual it had not been without effect upon him.

After he entered he locked the door.

"Why do you do that?" she asked, growing very pale as she observed the action.

"To secure us from intrusion."

"But who is likely to intrude upon us? There is no one in the house except my father, who is ill, and the servants, who are a long way off."

"That is true," he observed, with an evil smile. "Nevertheless, there are occasions when it is better to make assurance doubly sure, and this is one of them. I am afraid the subject upon which I want to talk will hardly commend itself to you on account of its novelty, for it is the old one of our marriage, which must take place to-morrow."

Ida braced herself up for a strong mental effort in order to withstand the mysterious influence he yielded over her, and was conscious, as she did so, of an increased power of resistance.

The fact is, she had hitherto felt so great a belief in, and terror of, the magnetic force which, undoubtedly, emanated from his will that she had, in a measure, passively yielded to its pressure.

"You are talking nonsense," she said, brusquely, although her heart was beating so fast that it would hardly permit her to enunciate the words. "If you think that either by threats or persuasions you will make me your wife you are quite mistaken, and the sooner you convince yourself of it the better."

"I shall employ neither the one nor the other," he rejoined, with a short laugh that might have issued from the lips of Mephistopheles, so evil was its sound. "I might in time induce you to come to me willingly as a bride, but circumstances have precipitated themselves, and I have not the leisure to devote to your subjugation. I deeply regret the necessity that leaves me no other alternative than to employ force."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, hardly above her breath, and moving a step nearer the window as she spoke.

"This. I shall have to leave the chateau to-morrow, and unless you swear to me a solemn oath that you will accompany me and contract a marriage with me I shall put you under the influence of a drug, which will throw you into a state of stupor. In that state I shall take you with me to Brussels, where, as you know, all marriages are civil, and require no religious ceremony, and there it will be very easy for me to make you utter all the responses that are necessary, for under those conditions I can, without difficulty, throw you into a mesmeric trance, and I shall then have entire control over you. Do you understand?"

He spoke with the easiest assurance, as if this plan, instead of being one of the most diabolical exercises of ingenuity that ever disgraced a man, were an everyday occurrence, which could not fail to be brought to a successful issue. Indeed, his voice and manner were both expressive of perfect confidence in himself and his own powers.

"You dare not do such a thing!" exclaimed Ida, when horror let her find her voice.

He laughed.

"There are few things I dare not do, mademoiselle—few things I have not done, indeed. You will find that my bite is worse than my bark even—that is to say, unless you are reasonable and come to terms. You see this?" He drew from his pocket a bottle, filled with some liquid, and a handkerchief, which latter he unfolded. "I have only to dip this handkerchief in the contents of this phial, and hold it over your nose and mouth, and you will become in-

sensible. Then you are absolutely in my power."

A loud shriek burst from the poor girl's lips, and she sprang to the window, which she contrived to partially throw up; but, quick as she was, he was prepared for her, and a minute later had caught her round the waist and held her tightly.

"Help! help!" she screamed, at the top of her voice, while she struggled violently in his grasp.

She was no weakly, puling girl, with muscles incapable of performing their functions, but a vigorous young creature, accustomed from early childhood to plenty of outdoor and gymnastic exercises, and capable of giving a strong man some trouble.

To subdue her was not such an easy task as Fanshawe had imagined, and all the time she was striving to elude him she was shrieking out for aid. Still, he was a very powerful man, and there could not be any doubt as to how the unequal contest must finally end.

His object was to secure her with the one hand, while he employed the other in administering the chloroform, and in this he seemed likely to succeed, for poor Ida was getting worn out with her struggles.

His one fear was lest Sir Douglas should overhear his daughter's cries. True, the baronet's chamber was some distance away, and Keziah Hepburn was with him. She would try to offer some explanation of the screams, which he would doubtless accept, unless he recognised his daughter's voice.

"By Heaven! I have you at last!" exclaimed Fanshawe, presently, as by a dexterous movement he pinioned the girl's arms to her side. "I think I shall be able to put a stop to your vocalization now, young lady!"

He took up the bottle, which, when he seized her first, he had placed on the table, and drew out the cork with his teeth, but at that moment a sudden, and most unexpected, interruption came. The window (which it will be remembered Ida had partially raised) was now thrown wide open, and there sprang into the room no less a person than Nadir.

Clothed in his dark tunic, with a white turban round his head, and his black eyes literally aflame with wrath, the Hindoo looked terrible enough to frighten even Fanshawe, and the latter involuntarily took a step backwards, the bottle of chloroform falling from his hand to the floor.

"Loose that lady, or I fire!" cried Nadir, and as he reached out his right hand the bright steel barrel of a revolver flashed in the light.

Fanshawe's nerve deserted him only for an instant, and hardly had the last word passed the Hindoo's lips than his hand stole to his breast-pocket in search of the pistol he always carried there.

It almost seemed as if Nadir guessed his intention—as was subsequently proved to be the case—for, quick as lightning, he pulled the trigger of the revolver, and Fanshawe fell back with a deep groan, while a thick stream of blood, issuing from his shoulder, told where he was wounded.

At the same moment there came a loud rapping at the door, and the voice of Sir Douglas, in terrified accents, demanded admittance.

Ida immediately unlocked the door, and the Baronet, with a loud cry of thankfulness, clasped her in his arms.

"I was afraid something had happened to you, my darling!" he said. "I heard your voice and then the pistol shot, and I should have been here sooner only weakness from lying in bed made my movements slower than usual. What does it all mean?"

He looked round in unqualified amazement, all his former fears of Ida taking the infection of the fever vanishing in the surprise of the moment.

On one side of the room lay Colonel Fanshawe, striving to stanch with a handkerchief the blood that was flowing from his

wound. Opposite stood the Hindoo, as if turned to stone, with the revolver still in his hand.

"For the love of Heaven move me from this place!" cried the officer, before Ida had time to speak; "the fumes of this infernal chloroform are stifling me!"

This was indeed the case, for when the bottle had dropped from his hand its contents were spilled on the carpet just where he was now lying.

### CHAPTER XLII.

The Earl of Westlynn was sitting in the library at Dering Court, gazing rather thoughtfully into the fire, whose flames leapt and sparkled, reflecting themselves in little quivering lances on the brightness of the steel bars. He had just had an interview with his son, and it had saddened him, for Arthur had sought his father for the purpose of breaking to him the news of his approaching departure from England.

Lord Westlynn was rather inclined to be vexed at the decision, which he regarded as unreasonable.

"You have not long returned from abroad," he remonstrated. "Why do you want to go back again?"

"Because I must have excitement of some kind," the young man answered, gloomily. "If I stay in England I shall go to the bad; whereas, if I get away into tropical forests, or amongst high mountains, where I can shoot big game, there may be a chance of salvation for me."

When he said this the Earl looked at him very intently, and some idea of the nature of his son's trouble seemed to strike him.

"Is it a love affair, Arthur?" he asked, and upon receiving an affirmative reply, added, "Can I not help you in any way? If I have the power you may trust my willingness."

"I know I may," Arthur replied, affectionately; "but in this case your aid could do nothing. I will tell you all about it sometime—not now."

"Will you not even tell me the lady's name?"

Arthur hesitated, then said,—  
"Ida St. John."

He watched his father intently as he spoke, and saw a conscious colour rise to the elder man's pallid face. Some impulse made the young man exclaim, impetuously,—

"Father—what is the origin of the quarrel that took place between you and Sir Douglas St. John?"

"That," responded the Earl, slowly; "is a question I cannot answer, for I declare to you I do not know. Sir Douglas and I were at one time great friends, then his wife ran away from him, and from that moment he was a changed man—in point of fact, I believe his mind partially gave way. He insulted me in public, when I went up to speak to him, and treated me in such a manner that the only resource left me was to challenge him. I am speaking of over twenty years ago, you must remember, when duels were commoner than they are now. We fought, and I was severely wounded. Since that time I have never spoken to him, and to this day I am ignorant of what caused his change of sentiment towards me."

Arthur had left the library without asking any more questions, or further enlightening his father as to his own disastrous love affair, and after his departure a flood of old recollections had assailed the Earl, whose face grew very sorrowful as he brooded over the fire.

His reverie was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a footman.

"Captain Verrall wishes to see you, my lord. I have shown him into the drawing-room, but he bid me say he should be glad of a private interview with your lordship."

"Bring him in here," responded the Earl,

rather surprised at the request, but imagining that Eric's errand might possibly have to do with Lord Dering's projected tour.

Verrall looked worried and anxious, as Lord Westlynn was quick to observe.

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" he said, as he heartily shook the young man's hand. "But why did you not warn us of your intended visit so that a carriage might have been sent to the station to meet you?"

"Because I was not aware, until just before I started, that I was coming here," replied Eric, in a rather embarrassed manner. "My visit is to you, Lord Westlynn, and my object is to speak of matters that nearly concern you."

"That is a portentous commencement," observed the Earl, lightly. "I hope the matters you speak of will not prove disagreeable."

"That I am unable to promise," was the gravely-spoken reply. "Indeed, I fear that you may have to recall many painful reminiscences ere our interview is ended. I may as well state at once that it chiefly concerns a lady you knew some years ago—a lady who went by the name of Flora Graham."

A sudden change came over Lord Westlynn. Up to now he had been standing opposite his guest, twirling his eyeglasses between his finger and thumb—a smiling, urbane host, whose calm demeanour gave no hint of those undercurrents of passion and emotion which were so soon to show themselves. As Eric pronounced the name of the actress his face grew ashen, and his brows contracted as if with pain.

"I am at a loss to know why you have thought fit to mention that lady, Captain Verrall," he said, a little haughtily, after he had recovered his self-possession. "May I ask how you came to know anything about her?"

"I will tell you," Eric answered; and then, as succinctly as he could, he gave an epitome of his own history, and the reasons that induced him to go to Elvaston, concluding with an account of his aunt having taken lodgings at the house of Anne Lloyd.

The Earl listened in silence, putting his hand to his face, as if to shade it from view.

"My aunt," continued the young soldier, when his story reached this point, "contrived to obtain a view of the inside of Miss Lloyd's safe"—(he did not think it worth while to mention that Lucy's success was due to the fact of her having put a narcotic in some toddy she mixed for her landlady on the occasion of her visiting that personage's room one evening!)"—and amongst several letters from Lady Hawksley she found a most important document—nothing more nor less, in fact, than the certificate of a marriage that had been celebrated between you and Flora Graham."

"Then," exclaimed the Earl, his voice very unsteady, and his hand trembling as he took it away from his face, "do you mean to tell me that a great joy has come to me in my old age, and that I am to greet you as my son?"

Eric was surprised at the way in which he spoke, for, judging from what he knew of his mother's story, it had seemed to him Lord Westlynn, grown tired of his plebeian wife, had endeavoured to bury in oblivion both her memory and that of her son. How was he to reconcile his aunt's statement of the Earl's desertion of her dying sister with his present emotion?

"There are several things to be explained before I can take that position," he said, gravely. "Do I clearly understand that you are willing to acknowledge your marriage with my mother?"

"Acknowledge it!" repeated Lord Westlynn, in an accent of surprise. "Most certainly I am willing to do so, and as for you—I shall be proud of such a son!"

"Then, how comes it that you have done my mother's memory injustice for so long, and have allowed me to remain in ignorance of who I was?" questioned our hero, sternly.

"I will answer the last question first. I was not aware of your existence. If I had been you may feel quite sure I should have claimed you."

"You knew your first wife had a son?"

"Yes; but I was told he was dead, and I believed it."

"By whom were you told this?"

"My mother-in-law—Lady Hawksley."

Eric drew a deep breath. The suspicions that had been floating dimly through his mind began to take shape. From the very first he had been unwilling to believe the Earl had played the cruel and treacherous part assigned to him, and yet Lucy had been so positive with regard to her facts.

"Lady Hawksley has played you false somewhere," he observed, and Lord Westlynn smiled cynically.

"That is very likely," he drily observed.

"Lady Hawksley does not hesitate at a lie where it will serve her purpose better than the truth."

"How was it you did not go to your wife in her last illness?" Eric asked, being determined to get at the whole of the facts before committing himself to any definite expression of opinion.

"I will tell you," responded the Earl, who was evidently under the influence of very great emotion, "and when you have heard the entire history you will be in a better position to judge. I will begin with my first acquaintance with Miss Graham, which took place when I was as young as you are now. I fell in love with her directly I knew her, and should have married her openly had it not been for my father, who was greatly prejudiced against actresses, and would have been driven wild at the idea of such a mésalliance as I contemplated. He was at that time suffering from heart disease, and the doctors had warned me that his life—which in any event could not be prolonged for more than three or four years—would be imperilled by any shock or sudden excitement. I told Flora of this, and it was in accordance with her wishes that we were secretly married when she was touring in Ireland."

"By-and-by it became necessary for her to give up the stage (for which, however, she had a great attachment), and it was then I took the little cottage at Elvaston, and she went to live there under the name of Mrs. George. I would have willingly acknowledged her as my wife, but my father's estates were not entailed, and I knew quite well that directly he heard of my marriage he would make a will and disinherit me; that is to say, if he survived the shock of the discovery. Well, time went on, and Flora still continued at Elvaston, and was, so she told me, very happy, although it was a grief to her not to be able to inform her sisters of her marriage."

"She wrote to them occasionally, but would not see them or tell them where she was for fear of our secret leaking out. The last time I saw her was when I took her to London for the purpose of doing some shopping, and after I had seen her safely home again I returned to Dering Court."

"A few days later a strange thing happened to me. I was publicly insulted by my friend and neighbour, Sir Douglas St. John, and a duel was the result. I may mention that Sir Douglas had married my wife's sister, Idalia, but although I was aware of the connection existing between us, Lady St. John was not—neither, of course, was her husband. Unhappily Idalia eloped from her home, and it was soon after this calamity had occurred that the duel took place near Blankenberg. I was badly, nay, almost fatally wounded, and was carried to a house near, where the next day I was joined by Lady Hawksley and her daughter."

The Earl paused a moment, as if embarrassed, and a slight flush rose to his brow. Presently he continued,—

"I must tell you that before I met Miss Graham I had paid considerable attentions to the Honourable Maud Hawksley, and had



unintentionally led her to believe I wished to make her my wife. To cut the matter short, she was in love with me, and when she heard that I was dangerously wounded she flung conventionalities to the wind, and declared she would nurse me. Her mother, being unable to restrain her from carrying her intention into effect, had no resource but to accompany her, and so they both came.

"For six weeks I hovered between life and death, and it was at this time that the telegrams and letters came from Elvaston telling me of Flora's illness and subsequent death. These were forwarded from my club, but as I was too ill for them to be given me Lady Hawksley took upon herself to open them, and—as I should now judge—also read Flora's own letters, thus arriving at the truth concerning my relations with her. When full consciousness returned to me, and the doctors allowed me to see my correspondence, I learned that my wife was dead. Lady Hawksley told me that she had gone to Elvaston directly after the event, and had seen to the burial, and had also sent little Frederick away with the servant, whose name was Lloyd. About a week after his mother's death the boy sickened with scarlet fever, and died, so that one stroke I lost both wife and children!"

Again the Earl paused, as if overcome with the pain of the memories his words evoked, but the weakness was only momentary, and a minute later he went on with his narrative.

"I do not think a man was ever placed in a more harrowing position than I was then; and, in addition to my other troubles, there came the knowledge that poor Maud Hawksley's reputation had suffered in consequence of her devotion to me. Remember"—interpolated Lord Westlyn—"that what I am now telling you is in the strictest confidence, and I trust to your honour never to reveal it!"

"You may trust to it," replied the young man, with grave earnestness.

"Well, then, I think it due to myself to say that Lady Hawksley came to me, imploring me with tears to repair the evil that her daughter's love had wrought, and marry Maud, who she said, was miserably unhappy. I did not know what to say, so I left as soon as I could, and went straight to Elvaston, where I had a stone erected to Flora's memory, after which I came to London and saw Anne Lloyd, who gave me full particulars of my wife and son's death. She even showed me a certificate of the child's burial, and told me he was only ill a few days, and was buried under the name of Frederick George."

"It was a lie!" exclaimed Eric. "She never had possession of the child at all."

"No—so it seems, from what you say; but how was I to know it? I have not the smallest doubt that the plot was concocted by Lady Hawksley, who foresaw I should marry Maud, and thought the fact of my already having a son and heir would be an obstacle in her way. Well, as events proved, I did marry Maud, for her mother came to me a second time and urged me to do so, and, on obtaining my promise, persuaded me to keep my first marriage secret, for as Flora and Frederick were both dead, she declared it would be absurd to announce to the world that I was a widower. Six months afterwards Maud Hawksley became my wife, and within a year she died; leaving me Arthur, whom I have long looked upon as my only son. Now do you think my conduct heartless, or are you willing to believe that under the circumstances it was excusable—and welcome a father, whose heart swells with happiness at the idea of greeting you as a son?"

Lord Westlyn's voice shook, and his lips trembled as he uttered these words; and Eric sprang impulsively forward, feeling that his former faith in the Earl was justified, and that this new-found parent was one for whom no son need have cause to blush.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

Mr. Fox was very much disturbed by Dr. Freeman's telegram, for he had grown very fond of Hilda, and his distress at learning her death was really sincere.

"Poor thing—poor, pretty young thing!" he muttered, taking off his eye-glasses, and rubbing them vigorously to clear away the mist that dimmed them. "It is sad, indeed, to think of her, cut off in the flower of her bright youth. Verily, the ways of Providence are inscrutable!"

He took the first train to Dering, and on his arrival found the physician at the station to meet him.

"I am glad you are come!" exclaimed the latter, whose manner was very much disturbed; "I am driven almost distracted by these dreadful occurrences!"

Mr. Fox looked surprised. The death of the young heiress was doubtless very sad, but is hardly accounted for so much agitation on the part of a man who was accustomed to constantly witness similar distressing scenes. "I will drive back to the Castle with you," went on Dr. Freeman, "and then I will acquaint you with what has happened; and glad, indeed, shall I be to shift the responsibility on someone else's shoulders, I can tell you!"

The journey from the station was speedily accomplished, but during its progress the physician informed Mr. Fox of all the particulars of Hilda's illness, including what had taken place between himself and Mary Goode that morning.

Astonished the lawyer most certainly was, but he did not lose his self-possession as Dr. Freeman had been in danger of doing.

"I have analysed the medicine, and I find it contains a narcotic, with whose nature I am but imperfectly acquainted," the physician continued, when he had narrated all that the nurse had told him. "However, there is no doubt whatever that Miss Fitzherbert's death was hastened by its administration, and circumstantial evidence points very strongly to Miss Monkton as the guilty person!"

"Very strongly, indeed!" returned the lawyer, with emphasis. "It must be borne in mind that she is the person who benefits most materially by her cousin's decease, but I confess I cannot quite understand the part played by the nurse."

"It puzzles me, too," admitted Dr. Freeman.

"During Miss Fitzherbert's illness has anything else occurred that seems to implicate Evelyn Monkton?" asked Mr. Fox, presently.

"Well, I can recall one circumstance, to which, at the time, I attached no importance, but which may form a link in the chain of evidence. I remember my patient once complained of a nauseous taste in her medicine, and as I was quite sure the drugs used ought to produce no such effect I was rather annoyed. Miss Monkton came in while the subject was under discussion, and took up the bottle for the purpose of tasting the mixture. As she did so she let it fall on the hearth, and of course it was broken, and its contents spilled. I don't know whether that may be taken as confirming our suspicions."

"Certainly it may. Indeed, it is rather an important confirmation, for it shows that Miss Monkton may have been put on her guard, and have exercised a greater amount of caution afterwards in medicating the mixture. That being so, the effect of the poison would naturally be less perceptible, and you would be less likely to suspect its presence."

"And you think she increased the dose last night because of her cousin's declared intention of making a will?"

"It is probable enough, but I am not in a position to state anything with certainty just now. You must give me time to think, and I must also have an interview with the nurse, who is, of course, a very important witness."

Dering Castle looked most dreary as the two

gentlemen slighted in front of its great oaken doors.

All the blinds were down, and the flag that usually streamed from one of the towers now drooped, half-mast high, in the chill air. Even Mr. Fox, practical lawyer as he was, shivered slightly on entering the hall.

He was immediately conducted upstairs, and was met on the landing by Evelyn, who looked pale, but was otherwise perfectly herself.

"I watched your arrival from my window," she explained, as she shook hands with the solicitor. "I am so glad you are come; for, indeed, I feel the want of someone to help me in the great trouble that has fallen upon us!"

Mr. Fox bowed a mute assent.

"And," continued Evelyn, plaintively, but very sweetly, as she lifted her large, dark eyes to meet his, "I know how my dear, dear cousin liked and trusted you, and I feel sure you will be as true a friend to me as you were to her!"

"I hope I shall always do my best in the interests of my clients," observed Mr. Fox, rather stiffly.

He did not like this beginning—Evelyn's extra sweetness, and evident wish to conciliate him, struck him as being what he termed "fishy."

"Come into my room," added the new mistress of the Castle. "I want to talk to you over the difficulties of my position, and to entreat your counsel—yours as well, Dr. Freeman," she added, glancing at the physician, with whom she was particularly anxious to continue on good terms.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Fox, "but I should like to see Miss Fitzherbert's nurse, if I may, before acceding to your wish."

Evelyn flashed a rapid glance from him to the physician, but she showed no sign of nervousness or hesitation.

"Certainly. Mary Goode shall be brought to my room, and the interview can take place at once."

But this did not all accord with Mr. Fox's ideas; so Dr. Freeman went in to Evelyn; while the nurse was sent to the solicitor in the late heiress's dressing-room.

(To be continued.)

## BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

—O—

### CHAPTER XXII.—(continued.)

OPAL's face flushed crimson as she read, and then paled to a sickly hue, for she could not doubt the genuineness of the epistle. Across it in Paul's hand was written, "Gave Valerie de Larue a hundred pounds, and found her a situation in a shop. Glad this matter is quietly settled;" and the date below showed this had taken place a few months before his father's death. She stood speechless, gazing at the written words that condemned her lover as a heartless seducer; and then with a strangled sob she tottered from the room, feeling her way like one blind; her eyes blurred with unshed tears, her heart riven with a pain deeper than his death had caused—for what can give a woman greater anguish than to know her lover is faithless?

"That will do it," muttered Vane, with a gleam of triumph in his cruel eyes. "Spragg will win!"

And that evening, as he dined at Temple Dene *à-la-tête* with its master, he told him he thought he might safely hope, and that when he next asked Opal her answer would not be a "no."

Emboldened by this the American adopted a warmer manner towards her; held her hand longer than was absolutely necessary, let his eyes dwell frequently on her pale loveliness—altogether conducted himself more like a lover than he had hitherto dared. It is doubtful if the object of these attentions noticed them. She had become more listless

more apathetic, since the reading of that fatal letter. Her heart seemed dead within her—life a weariness. She had not even the consolation of thinking the dead man worthy of the sorrow she felt for him; the bitterness of death was past for her. Nothing, she thought, could be worse than the knowledge of his unworthiness. This made her listen to Lady Dorothy—who had returned to Westcourt—with indifference when she enlarged upon the advantages of a match with the millionaire.

Lady Dorothy had had her romance in the past, and a lover—a penniless attaché. But she had lived long enough to see the folly of "love in a cottage," and to bless her friends for having married her to a rich man, who had given her high position during his life, and left her plenty of money at his death. She honestly believed that Opal would be contented, if not happy, with Spragg, or she would not have urged her to marry him.

Paul was dead. The past could not be recalled, nor the dead brought to life, so it was better she should be married and settled. Had Chichely lived her ladyship would have helped the lovers to the utmost extent of her power, and probably have checkmated Copeland Vane; but, as it was, for once in a way she agreed with him, and thought Opal would be silly to refuse such a golden chance.

To Opal life now seemed an unreality, a hideous dream. Nothing touched her much save one thing, and that was Billie's increasing delicacy. The fear that he would die added yet another pang to the sorrows she endured, made the sickening, horrible pain at her heart grow greater.

If she lost him what would there be left to live for? Nothing. Her existence would be unbearable. Something must be done to save him, and she knew, felt, in a dim sort of way, that she could purchase those things that would prolong his life. Purchase them? Yes; but at what a cost!

The sacrifice of her liberty, her innocence, her virtue almost, for to her a marriage without love was a deadly sin, a thing from which she recoiled with horror and shuddering revulsion.

Yet one evening when Billie, after a violent fit of coughing, sank back on his pillows exhausted, blood-stained froth on his pallid lips, and Vane violently accused her of being unfeeling and selfish, saying that the child's death would be at her door, she turned to him, and said,—

"Don't reproach me any more; I cannot bear it. Do with me as you will."

"What do you mean?" he asked, quickly.

"I mean—that I will—marry—Mr. Spragg," she faltered, with trembling lips and ashen face.

"That is right. Sensible girl!" cried her father, gaily. "Things will be well with us now," and catching up his hat he set off at once to Temple Dene to tell the good tidings.

Mr. Spragg would have flown there and then over to The Rest to have heard the news confirmed by his love, but Vane wisely objected to that, and said that on the morrow he would be expected.

Opal sat in the "den" the next morning beside the side of the sleeping child, for whose sake she was going to sell her loveliness and liberty, when the American came in.

"Is—is it true," he stammered, standing beside her, "what your father tells me?"

"Yes, it is true," she answered, coldly, without raising her eyes.

"You will be my wife?" with joyful incredulity.

"Yes, since you desire it."

"Desire it? Ah! I more than desire it. I have no words to tell you how I have longed for you, prayed that you might say 'yes' to my suit. Dearest, you shall never regret this," and the mummy knelt at her feet, and, imprisoning the passive hands kissed them rapturously.

With a shudder she drew them away, but a glance at the still little figure on the couch made her leave them in the man's hot clasp.

"I will devote my life to makin' you happy," he went on, his eyes fixed passionately on the downbent head. "It shall be my first and greatest consideration. You shall never want for anything, nor those you care for, and you shall do just as you like in every respect. You'll be as free, nay, freer, than you are now."

"Tell me that you care a little for me," he whispered, passing his arm round her shrinking waist, and drawing that fresh, beautiful face near his own cadaverous, wrinkled one. "You do?"

"I—I—can't—think—in time!" she faltered.

"Yes, yes, in time," he agreed, cheerfully. "I guess we shall get on well. If we don't the fault will not be mine. I love you too well not to try to win a response from you. Do you like this?" and drawing a case from his pocket he displayed a hoop of magnificent brilliants.

"Yes," she murmured.

"Let me put it on," and he slipped the ring on the third finger. It seemed to burn her like red-hot iron, and she started as she felt the badge of slavery press on her flesh, uttering no word of thanks to the man who longed for a few kind words. "You will be happy as my wife?" he went on, after a pause. "You will tell me that, at least?"

Happy as his wife, when every nerve and fibre thrilled with horror and disgust at the mere thought!

"Can't you tell me that?" he repeated, a little wistfully.

"I shall obey you. We need never quarrel," she answered, in a low tone.

"Is that all? Oh! my darling, be kind to me!" he cried. "I simply worship you. You are the hope of my life. Kiss me, kiss me, to show the love is not all on my side!" As he spoke he threw his arms round her, straining her to his breast.

Reluctantly she put her lips to his wrinkled face, and he thrilled with a fierce glow of passion at the mere touch of that soft mouth, and pressed her closer to him, while the loathing she felt made her wish to die, and thus escape the awful fate that lay before her.

With ashen cheeks she struggled from his embrace, and fled from the room; Vane, who was on the watch, instantly entering the den, and suavely smoothing over her flight by assuring his son-in-law elect that girls were always shy and bashful at first, but he had no doubt that in a short time she would be affectionate enough.

And while her father lied to the rich man the wretched girl, with an anguished cry of inward agony, flung herself face downwards on the bare boards of her little room, throwing the ring on the floor, where its splendid stone glittered in the sunlight like so many eyes watching her, and exulting over her downfall.

There she wrestled with her shame and despair, gave vent to the pent-up, passionate grief of her heart. The sunbeams glinted on the radiance of her hair, the quivering lips, the wild eyes, and ashen face, showing that youth and joy had fled for ever from that beautiful countenance, leaving nothing save a blank coldness in their place.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER that one outburst of anguish Opal became quite passive. She received her fiancé's attentions with indifference. She never offered a caress, yet she set her teeth and bore those he gave without any visible sign of the shuddering horror she felt when the lipless mouth approached hers, and the hot hands pressed her cold fingers. She took his presents, drove out with him, received congratulations, in the same passionless, apathetic manner.

It was in vain that Ruby remonstrated, Lady Dorothy advised, and Copeland Vane stormed. She only gave the latter, when he was particularly abusive, one glance from the

hunted-looking, wistful eyes, and it silenced him. It seemed to her that she was numbed, powerless—powerless to break the icy fetters that bound her soul, and made her indifferent to all things.

She took no interest in the preparations for the marriage, which was hurried on because the groom was eager to be wed, and the bride made no objection, and because Billie was to be got out of England before the chill autumn winds began to blow. Lady Dorothy provided a lavish trousseau, at which her niece hardly glanced, passing over the dainty tea-gowns and pretty dinner-dresses as though they were a bundle of rags, and showing absolute repugnance to don several costly suites of jewels that Mr. Spragg sent, or the sables that cost a small fortune.

Surely never was a bride so listless! The lovely presents were cast aside, unnoticed. It gave her no pleasure that all the *élite* of the county were sending gifts for her acceptance—that Mrs. Bevoir presented a silver coffee set, and Lady Scargill a bisonit box of antique workmanship, Mrs. Davidson two jewelled waist-bands, the Rainhams an old punch bowl, the Duchess de Pescara a gold vase, and many others who had snubbed her in the past, when she was plain Miss Vane, with no prospects, and who were eager now to pay court to the future mistress of Temple Dene and countless greenbacks. It only made her feel the emptiness and vainness of existence.

"Would you like lace added to the front, or do you consider the pearl-beading sufficient?" inquired Lady Dorothy, when the wedding-gown arrived at Westcourt, and was spread out in all its gleaming magnificence for inspection.

"I don't mind," answered Opal, carelessly.

"You ought," retorted the elder lady, quickly, shooting a glance at her from her sharp eyes.

"Ought I?"

"Of course. To most women looking well on their wedding-day is a matter of importance."

"Then—I am different from—most women."

"How?"

"Looking well on my wedding-day is a matter of no moment to me."

"I tell you it ought to be!" reiterated the old lady, testily.

"I do not see why it should."

"And I don't see why it should not."

"I am not marrying for love, remember."

"I am aware of that; still natural vanity naturally makes women wish to look well on occasions of this sort."

"I haven't any natural vanity," returned Miss Vane, with a mirthless laugh, "and I wish that I had been born ugly as a Calmuck Tartar."

"Humph!" said her ladyship, eyeing her again: "that's a curious wish."

"What is there curious about it?"

"Girls as a rule are proud of their beauty."

"When it brings them what it has brought me?" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"What do you mean?"

"When it gets them sold to the highest bidder, bartered like a bale of merchandise for filthy lucre:—"

"Gold, gold, gold, gold—  
Sought and bartered, bought and sold;  
Spurned by the young,  
And hugged by the old,  
To the very verge of the churchyard mould—  
Gold, gold, gold, gold!"

Liberty exchanged for money, virtue for vice, happiness for misery, hope for despair. Ah! do not tell me beauty is a good possession."

"Opal, are you mad?"

"Mad, no; I wish I was, then I might forget."

"Forget what?"

"The future that lies before me, the weary stretch of blank years that I must live through, for I am young and strong, and death never comes to those who crave for it!"

"Do you mean to say that you crave for



death?" demanded her ladyship, in amazement.

"And would not you?" answered the girl, turning her wistful blue eyes on to her companion's face, "if you detested the sight of the man who was going to be your husband, if his touch made you shudder, and the sound of his voice to tremble?"

"Opal, this is dreadful! If these are the feelings with which Mr. Spragg inspires you, you must not dream of marrying him. It would be wicked, horrible!"

"Not more wicked than to let these we love die for want of common necessities," she retorted, with a wild laugh. "I am between two fires, and they burn and scorch me terribly. But be satisfied," she went on, calmly, suppressing the emotion that threatened to overcome her, "I am content. I give myself to Mr. Spragg, and he in exchange gives me diamonds and pearls, fine clothes, and fine houses, a box at the opera, carriages and horses, surrounds me with luxuries. My lot will be a bright one, according to the way the worldly think. What more can I desire?"

"Everyone will answer—nothing." "Ay! nothing," echoed Opal, bitterly. "That is the right word. The sooner the bargain is complete the better; the sooner I am irrevocably his the better. Don't look horrified, aunt, my great good fortune has made me light-headed. Wait awhile, and see how *grande dame* I shall be—how haughty, how proud, how cold and heartless. I shall learn the role thoroughly, and play it to perfection. And now, will you leave me alone, please; I have some matters to arrange and see to."

"Of course, my dear; but if you haven't quite made up your mind we can—"

"I have made up my mind. Don't give another thought to my wild words. I know I am—very fortunate."

Lady Dorothy did not see the sarcasm of this speech, so she kissed her and left the room.

But not being quite satisfied in her own mind about certain things, she ordered the brougham and drove over to The Rest to interview Copeland Vane. She found him sitting in the library, surrounded with costly books, many new, and recent ones, a stand with liqueurs at his elbow, and a fragrant cigar between his thin lips.

"Put out that cigar," she said, irritably, as she entered. "You know I hate smoke."

"Yes, I know that is one of your little peculiarities," he said, coolly, as he tossed the weed through the open window.

"That is extravagant," she exclaimed.

"It is of no account now. There are plenty more there," and he waved his hand airily towards a handsome smoker's cabinet.

"I see. Times are changed with you."

"Slightly. To what do I owe the honour of this visit?" he continued, with languid indifference, dropping into an easy chair, and keeping his finger between the pages of the book he held, as though to intimate that he didn't mean the interview to last very long. He could afford to be insolent now—to return some of the unmerciful thrusts she had given him in the past.

Spragg had settled four hundred a-year on him. Billie was to accompany the bride and bridegroom on their honeymoon, and afterwards to live permanently at Temple Dene, and the other three boys were to go to a first-rate boarding-school at the American's expense. Vane felt independent.

"I have come to speak about Opal."

"What of her?" he asked sharply.

She had been staying with her aunt for a week, having gone there to, ostensibly, superintend the final preparations for the wedding, which was to take place at Westcourt.

"Do you think she ought to marry Spragg?"

"Ought to? Good heavens! Of course she ought. What are you talking about?"

"Of your eldest daughter, and her ap-

proaching marriage," returned Lady Dorothy, coolly.

"I know, I know," he muttered, apologetically, feeling that he must not entirely offend this old woman whom he hated so cordially. "I mean, what makes you ask such a thing?"

"I don't think she cares a fig for him."

"Possibly not. How many women do care for the men they marry?"

"In England we suppose that the majority espouse the men of their choice, those they love."

"And I think that that is a popular error. Nine tenths of the women marry for a home, or position, or the convenient protection of an honest man's name."

"And only one-tenth for love. Eh?"

"Just so."

"That is a sad way of looking at it."

"A very sensible way."

"Now, Cope, answer me truly; did you put any special pressure on Opal to induce her to consent to marry this man?"

"On my honour, no!" returned Vane coolly, meeting his visitor's steady gaze unflinchingly.

"It is her own wish (what a wonder the lie didn't strangle him?); she is doing it for Billie's sake."

"Ah! How she adores the child!"

"To an absurd extent, I think."

"I wonder you do think it absurd, since it makes her do what you must very much approve of."

"True. That was fairly hit."

"You can assure me, then, that you only gave her good advice, left her free to act as she pleased?"

"Yes. She was quite free, and she herself told me she wished to enter into this marriage, which you must admit is the most sensible thing she can do."

"From a worldly point of view," admitted Lady Dorothy. "I don't know what to say from a sentiment."

"I hope she does not intend to go in for any more sentiment; that is a sort of thing that does not answer in the nineteenth century."

"Not according to your way of thinking. Eh! Cope? Doesn't bring enough grist to the mill. But don't be downhearted, the daughter that remains on your hands won't give you much trouble in that way. She's too true a child of her father for that."

"Thanks. I accept the compliment, and I have no doubt that some day Ruby will do me great credit."

"By marrying the richest man with the highest title that she can possibly find. Well, well, that is your wisdom, and it is of this world; perhaps, after all, it is the best."

"I think so."

"Of course. It is to your advantage to do so. Whoever pays the piper you won't, and whoever doesn't dance and enjoy themselves you will. Ta, ta! See you on Wednesday at the wedding. You've seen that the settlements are correct and liberal?"

"They leave nothing to be desired."

"The Yankee has one good quality."

"And that —?"

"He's as liberal as a lord," with which encomium on her future relative Lady Dorothy, entering her brougham, drove back to Westcourt, and went on with her preparations.

A week later the marriage took place at Dene Church.

It was a brilliant affair. Nothing had been omitted that could add splendour and pomp to it.

The bride's dress was a dream of beauty, her face a vision of loveliness; while the six maids that supported her round the altar, were all remarkable for their good looks.

Prominent among them shone Ruby, whose rich, glowing face looked handsomer than ever, from its costly setting of amber silk, delicate lace, and drooping plumes. Many of the young aristocrats of the county sent languishing glances in her direction; and Jack Rainham, who was assisting his father, the Bishop of Birmingham, to perform the

ceremony, forgot what he was doing, and stared at her fixedly with all his heart in his big brown eyes.

But ambitious Ruby never glanced at him; she reserved all her smiles for Lord Mount Severn, who had returned from Norway, and was one of the groomsmen, and from whose extreme attentiveness she augured great things.

The sun burst out from the leaden clouds as Opal knelt at the altar beside the man to whom she was plighting her troth, and lit up the pallid beauty of her face, and the depth of her azure eyes.

"A good omen," whispered Spragg, as the ceremony concluded, he drew her hand through his arm, and led the way to the vestry.

A gay scene ensued there. Many claimed their right to kiss the bride, and not a few wondered why her lips were so deathly cold.

She was hardly sensible of what was passing around; and when, as the carriage drove back to Westcourt, the bridegroom gathered her in his arms to take his first bridal embrace, he found she had fainted.

He lifted her out easily, and bore her in his strong arms to the boudoir, where he knew no strangers would penetrate, and then set to work to bring her to. He flung back the costly veil, and deluged her face with cologne from a flask that stood on the side-table; and then, passion mastering him, he bent and kissed the chilled lips again and again, until some of the life and warmth from him seemed to be communicated to her. She stirred; the colour flickered to her cheek; her eyes opened.

"My darling! my wife! Are you better?" he cried tenderly. But as the blue eyes met his they closed again, and she shuddered violently.

Not a pleasant way for a man's endearments to be received by his newly-wedded wife; and Spragg felt a sensation as though ice water had been thrown over him.

But in a few moments Opal had recovered herself, and, apologising to him for the trouble she had given him, drew her veil over her ashen face, and, leaning on his arm, went to the drawing-room, and headed the table at the breakfast, and went through the whole ordeal without flinching. Only she murmured "thank Heaven," when she and her husband, with Billie opposite them were driving away in the carriage amid a shower of rice and slippers en route for the Continent.

(To be continued.)

THE everyday cares and duties, which men call drudgery, are the weights and counterpoises of the clock of time, giving its pendulum a true vibration, and its hands a regular motion.

It was M. Pasteur who, some years ago, saved the silkworms of his native country from a disease that was fast destroying them. The late President Thiers said that Pasteur's services in this matter saved to France more than the immense sum which that country had to pay to Germany as indemnity after the war. M. Pasteur has also been warmly thanked by the sheep-breeders of France for his successful efforts some years ago in staying an epidemic which was rapidly destroying their flocks.

AUSTRALIA AS A HEALTH RESORT. — Except for those who may have wealthy friends living in the interior in a favourable locality, Australia has been practically found to be not a suitable place for invalids. Anyone who has made acquaintance with a bush hotel would be slow to recommend it as a residence, even to a man in health, and would certainly advise an invalid to avoid it. The most eminent physician in Melbourne has recently stated that out of hundreds with weak lungs who had consulted him during a period of twenty-five years, not one of those who had remained on the coast had materially improved.

## A DAY IN THE PAST.

That heart, dost remember one day, when we stood  
Hand in hand 'neath the arch of the  
heaven's blue dome,  
In a cool, fragrant haunt of the blossoming  
wood,  
While a dear little bird, in its wee, cozy  
home,  
Sung down from the green, dusky stillness  
above  
A carol of peace and contentment and love?  
The sun filtered down thro' the scarce-stirring  
leaves,  
And lay in a network of gold at our feet;  
A zephyr, with tones like an infant that  
grieves  
In its stumbers, went by—how soft and fitfully  
sweet.  
The slow-swaying censers of delicate bloom  
Sung upward a cloud of delicious perfume.  
About the white hem of your white, clinging  
dresses  
The sunlight and shadows wove quaintest  
designs;  
The wind touched your cheeks with a linger-  
ing caress.  
And seemed, 'mid their bloom soft and  
dainty, to find  
Delectable sweets; for they thought, I  
suppose,  
They really were sipping the heart of a rose.  
I 'prisoned your hands firm and closely in  
mine,  
Then looked in your eyes, dear, to read there  
my doom;  
And I felt the soft fingers more tenderly  
twine  
Round my own; and I watched, as con-  
fusion's faint bloom  
Deepened slow on your cheek, and the shy act  
confessed  
What your blue eyes concealed as they hid on  
my breast.  
My hair is, to-day, like the snow falling  
down  
On the wide outside world; and above your  
dear head  
No more lies the weight of a thick golden  
crown,  
Now a thin silver diadem rests in its stead.  
But our hearts are the same as the day when  
we stood  
And whispered our love in the blossoming  
wood!

C. G.

## A FLOWER OF FATE.

—o—

## CHAPTER XI.

"It is impossible!"  
Vera's voice was faint, but firm.  
"But, my dear Miss De Mortimer, consider  
I offer you practically an assured successful  
first appearance in London. My theatre  
commands the attention of the critics. If it  
is a matter of three or four more pounds in  
the salary, why—"  
"It is not that," Vera broke in, quietly.  
"Your terms were most liberal. In every way  
I have cause to thank you, but I must decline  
your offer."  
Mr. Augustus Robinson, of the Thespia  
Theatre, London, rubbed his brow in great  
perturbation. Here was a gem as costly in  
its way as any that had come under his  
notice; and yet, marvellous to relate, the gem  
absolutely refused to come to the first jeweller's  
to be polished and set before taking the world  
by storm.  
This girl's beauty, her lovely voice, her  
undeniable talents, apart from that strange,  
sed fascination she possessed, all formed a

total, which spelt a triumph for whichever  
theatrical manager was lucky enough to pro-  
cure her.

"Well," he said, at last, "I don't know  
what to do; it's most awkward. I have come  
down here expressly to see you—expressly,  
Miss De Mortimer—and I confess I am dis-  
appointed at your decision."

"I did not know you were coming, other-  
wise I should not have permitted it if I could  
possibly have prevented it," Vera said, very  
quietly. "It is a long journey to take for  
nothing, and I am exceedingly sorry you had  
all the trouble for—"

"Oh! I don't mind the trouble, nor the  
expense," observed Mr. Robinson, touched by  
her courtesy. "It is because I am so honestly  
pleased with your performance, Miss De  
Mortimer, that I am disappointed. Now,  
won't you reconsider your decision?"

Vera shook her head.

"What are your objections?" asked the  
manager.

The girl was silent for a few minutes, then  
lifting her great, lustrous eyes to his she  
said,—

"I could not appear at a theatre like the  
Thespia. I could not."

Mr. Robinson coloured, and cleared his  
throat.

Vera went on, slowly,—

"I will be frank with you. I dislike this  
life. I am forced into it. I suppose I must  
continue with it until—well, I don't know  
what could occur that would end it, but  
as I must continue I have made up my mind.  
I shall renounce opera bouffe. I shall go into  
the higher grades of the stage. I can act.  
Although I hate the life, yet I know that I  
am determined to study, to practice, and to  
appear in the future only in the legitimate  
parts. Now you understand."

"Perfectly; now let us to business. When-  
ever you are prepared to begin that line, Miss  
De Mortimer, I'm your man. Send me a  
word. You shall study under my care. I  
will arrange about your appearance. Bless  
me, I have never taken so much trouble for  
a soul for years; but something tells me it  
won't be trouble wasted. You have genius,  
you have fire; you will succeed. I am only  
sorry on one account that you renounce this  
engagement. I have got a part that would  
suit your voice down to the ground."

His tone was persuasive, but Vera was  
firm.

"I cannot do it, Mr. Robinson," she said.

"How! Cannot do what?" exclaimed her  
father's voice from the doorway.

Vera and the London manager were in the  
small green-room. They had had their con-  
versation all to themselves up to this point.  
Vera stood silent, a quiet, slender figure in some  
quaint robe of gray, with her masses of ruddy  
golden hair piled high on her head till they  
formed a coronet.

With Mr. De Mortimer came in Lord  
Vivian.

"Cannot do what?" asked Mr. De Mor-  
timer again, his face darkening with anger at  
a suspicion of the truth.

"Your daughter, my dear sir, I regret to  
say, will not consent to accept my offer."

"Not so!" Nathaniel swallowed the  
oath he was about to utter. "What the deuce  
do you mean by such conduct, Vera? Absurd!  
Mr. Robinson is conferring a great honour on  
you. Here are you, a child in the profession,  
with the offer of an engagement at the Thespia  
in your hand, a thing any actress would envy  
you, and you—Oh, come! Nonsense! Sign at once!"

"I cannot," Vera said, quietly.

Mr. De Mortimer's face was not pretty with  
a scowl on it. He moved forward and grasped  
Vera by the arm.

"You must!" he growled, in a whisper.

"Confound it, you shall!"

The girl met his angry gaze.

"I will not," she answered, coldly, and  
contemptuously drawing her arm away.

"You cursed prig!" snarled De Mortimer

in her ear, "setting yourself up like a tragedy  
queen to say what is right and what is wrong.  
I tell you this, Vera, I have grown pretty sick  
of your airs and graces, and unless you are  
very careful I shall turn you off my hands  
altogether, and you can either starve or do  
worse for all I care."

"Father," the girl said, clearly and reso-  
lutely, "have I not obeyed you in everything?  
Have I not gone against the wish of my dear  
dear mother, and become an actress? You  
know I have. Then, in this case, I beg of  
you to listen to me. I cannot go to the  
Thespia. You know, as all the profession  
knows, what a reputation the place bears.  
Mr. Robinson is kind—more than kind—but  
I cannot do any self-respect by accepting the  
engagement."

"Miss De Mortimer"—Lord Vivian came  
forward hurriedly; he saw the dark, wicked  
look growing on De Mortimer's face, and his  
conscience reproached him—"please do not  
think you are bound to take this offer. Mr.  
Robinson doesn't mean that, I know. It is  
entirely as you yourself like to do."

"Thank you, my lord. I am sorry to dis-  
appoint you and Mr. Robinson; but I must  
decline the engagement."

Mr. Robinson took up his hat.

"Don't forget," he said, with a meaning  
look at Vera. "If you want me send me a  
line, and if any possible chance you should  
alter your mind I am staying in Abbey  
Chamber to-night, and could see you in the  
morning."

De Mortimer followed the London manager  
out of the room in silence.

He was white with rage. At that instant  
he could have struck Vera willingly; but he  
restrained himself, only swearing he would be  
even with her by and by.

Vera sat down wearily as her father went.  
She put her arm on the table, and leant her  
head on her hand.

The Earl drew near to her.

"Will you forgive me, Miss de Mortimer?"  
he pleaded, gently.

"What for, my lord?"

"For bringing Mr. Robinson down. I  
deserve not to be forgiven. Will you believe  
me when I say I forgot for the moment the  
class of theatre the Thespia was, of the  
loathsome surroundings you must have  
there? I only thought of it as the one  
theatre where your voice would be heard to  
its full advantage."

He spoke eagerly. Vera was silent.

"Oh, how I long to have it all!" he heard  
her whisper.

His face flushed.

"Vera," he began to whisper, passionately,  
but he got no further, for at that instant  
Maggie Delane and Wenty arrived.

"Guess who is here, Vera?" cried Maggie,  
gaily.

Vera looked up inquiringly.

"Come in, sir," Maggie continued, going to  
the door.

In answer to her call Tom Watson came  
forward, looking eager and handsome.

Vera welcomed him warmly.

"Amy would make me come," he said;  
"and here is a little note she has sent you!"

Vera took it with a smile.

"I will read it by-and-by," she said.

She was nervous and wretched. The love-  
light in Lord Vivian's eyes had come as a  
shock to her; and there was this other man,  
who implored for the love it was not in her  
power to give.

"We are keeping you when you are so  
tired," observed the Earl, as he watched her  
sensitive face. "Watson, where have you  
come from?"

"Immediately from Sir Keith Moreton's  
place, the Gill. Darnley is there; he sent a  
message to you to know if you were not going  
back for the ball?"

Lord Vivian's brows met in a slight, though  
decided frown.

"I cannot say. I have business that may



detain me. Of course, if I can possibly manage it, I shall be there."

Maggie had bent towards Vera.

"Vera," she whispered, "what's wrong with Nathaniel, he looks awfully black?"

"He is angry with me," Vera answered, her fingers closing nervously over Amy's letter. "I have refused Mr. Robinson's offer. I expect you think me wrong like the rest, Maggie?"

"No I don't," answered Miss Delane promptly. "I know what the 'Thespia' is like, I was there. It wouldn't suit you, dear; you are quite right."

"Always kind and thoughtful, Maggie."

Tears were springing to Vera's eyes.

"Nonsense! Now run and get off those garments; you look dead tired."

Vera rose. She laid out her hand to the Earl.

"I thank you for your kindness, my lord; I am only sorry I could not repay it better."

"I am repaid a thousand times," whispered Lord Vivian, his wisdom almost carried away by the passionate surging of his heart, "by those kind words."

"May I come and see you to-morrow morning?" asked Tom Watson, as Vera put her hand in his.

"Miss Delane is here, ask her," she answered, with a warm smile.

"Oh, yes, come if you like!" Maggie cried, cheerily; "but not too early. I shall insist on Vera taking a good rest to-morrow morning; she wants it badly."

Vera passed on to her dressing-room. Here she dismissed the woman who had assisted her during the performance, and when alone she knelt down and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, mother, mother!" was the cry of her heart. "Why did you leave me? why were you taken from me? If only you were here now to tell me how to act! I am growing weary—very and frightened."

Vera was a brave girl, ordinary nervousness was not in her nature. Yet something in De Mortimer's black, scowling face, as she had met it to-night in her steadfast refusal to submit to his will, sent a cold shudder through her as she remembered it—a shudder of premonition that trouble was in store for her.

The morning of the day that was to see its finish in the grand masked ball at the Gill, broke cold and cheerless.

Lady Anice, however, was all sunshine and brilliancy. There was lots to do, she declared; an immense amount of work and thought still resting on those slender, pretty shoulders.

Sir Keith was at once amused and enthralled by her babyish ways, and constituted himself her head attendant during the day.

Rex Darnley went out shooting with Lord Dunmoor in the morning, but somehow his spirits matched the morning—he was dull and out of sorts.

Lord Vivian had not returned yet; it was his absence that brought that gloom to Rex's face. What business was there to detain the Earl in Abbey Chester? None. Then why did he remain? Was he bent on fooling Vera, winning her love as he might well do by his frank, handsome presence, winning her young heart to greater sorrow even than it knew now?

Rex clenched his hands as he stood alone on the moor and watched Lord Dunmoor go striding off with the keeper.

It was not in Eric Lord Vivian to deceive and betray, came the next quick thought; and yet what could come of such conduct? Vera could never be his wife; his family name and pride called out against this.

The girl was beautiful, gentle, fair, with that nameless something that bespoke a lady; but she was akin with pitch. Her surroundings were of the lowest. She must wed one of her own order.

Rex stood motionless as this thought came. It forced itself into words.

"One of her own order! Good Heaven! No, what am I saying? She is too great, too precious a pearl even for my hands to touch. Oh, Vera, my darling! the only woman I shall ever love! Yes, it is confessed—love! My only love; yet lost to me for ever!"

The image of Tom Watson rose to his mind unconsciously. He shook his head.

"You have chosen badly, my sweet one," he murmured. "This boy will love you now—yes, you are the very sun of his life—but he is weak! He will not prize you at your worth—temptation will come again—your power will have gone—your future will be misery!"

Lord Dunmoor shouting to him from a distance woke him from his gloomy reflections, and pushing them from him he strode to meet his friend.

Towards evening, as an air of approaching festivity hung over the Gill, the Earl arrived. Lady Anice, grown a trifle weary of Sir Keith, even when a great state hung as yet in the balance, could not resist an airy flirtation with the handsome Lord Vivian.

"At last—you are come at last!" she cried, bending down the large hall to meet him, looking a veritable fairy in some skillfully designed, careless-looking costume of warm red silk, with an open plait of red plush draped at the neck and sleeves with some subtly chosen lace. "Truant that you are, where have you been?"

The Earl smiled his admiration as he took her hand.

"Am I so honoured—did you really miss me?" he asked lightly. "Had I but guessed I would have flown here instead of burying my wits in my tedious accounts all alone in solitary deserted Beaconsfield."

"Is that the truth?" flashed a quick thought into Rex Darnley's mind; the next instant he was vexed beyond measure at his doubt.

Lord Vivian clasped his hand warmly.

"Well, now you are here I can find you work," cried Lady Anice. "Rex is a boor. He actually refuses to do anything for me. Can you believe it?"

"Hardly," returned the Earl, with a laugh.

"You have so many cavaliers, Anice, I should be in the way," Darnley observed, drily.

Sir Keith watched the dainty form of his heart's queen flitting about with the Earl with a grave, pained expression on his face, and a strange pang in his breast.

Rex knew the meaning of his host's gravity well.

"Ah! if this would only warn you!" he mused, to himself. "You are too genuine, too good, too golden for that airy butterfly, whose brilliancy is, after all, but tinsel and dross!"

Out loud he said casually,—

"Do you expect a large party to-night, Moretown?"

The young Baronet woke hastily from his thoughts.

"All the county," he answered, with somewhat of a forced laugh. "Dunco knows so many people, and we have been literally beset for invitations. I hope it will be a success."

"I am sure of it," Rex said, warmly. "You have made such magnificent preparations."

"It was Lady Anice who designed and thought of all!"

"Indeed! Well, Anice knows something about these sort of entertainments."

"Taking my name in vain," laughed that fair lady, flitting up to them. "Sir Keith, do come with me. They are building up that embankment of flowers we designed together last night, and your suggestions are needed."

As sunshine on a cloudy day so shone the delight and gratification now on Sir Keith Moretown's handsome face.

Rex stood and watched them go away together, the man bending his head with lover-like devotion to the pretty, babyish countenance uplifted to meet his.

The evening hours passed. Dinner was partaken of, not in the ordinary ceremonious way,

but in a hurried fashion, and then, when all the lights were arranged, everyone retired to their room to attire for the ball.

Lady Anice, secure in her brother's help, had coaxed the great Parisian dressmaker into sending her a gown positively unique in its beauty and magnificence. She wore floating robes of azure gauze over a petticoat of thickly woven silver thread embroidery. Her tiny feet were shod in shoes to match, on which glittered diamond stars, some of the same remaining heirlooms of her mother's jewel-box. Her hair was veritably powdered with small glittering pins and stars of the same precious stones, and as she stood gazing with a delighted smile at her image she looked, indeed, as her maid declared, "an angel of loveliness."

It seemed almost a pity to hide all the radiance, but it was only for a time, and after all there would be great fun in guessing at the masked people. So she was enveloped in a large trailing black silk domino, which completely hid her azure robes; and drawing the hood over her glittering head, and fixing the mask over her dainty features, she stood disguised in all save her small feet.

The military bands summoned from London were already giving forth their voluptuous strains as she flitted down the stairs.

At the entrance to the ball-room she found herself in a crowd of masked guests, and one tall form, shrouded in its domino, bent and whispered in her ear.—

"Beautiful lady, be worthy of your attire—for once forget yourself. Break no hearts to-night."

"Who are—?" began Lady Anice, but the figure had vanished. She felt annoyed. "It was Rex, of course," was her next thought. "No one but Rex dare speak like that to me. Now for Sir Keith."

The scene was a strange one—the myriads of lights, the scent of the flowers, the sounds of the music, and that ever-moving throng of black-robed figures, with their faces concealed.—only now and then could a glimpse be caught of a colour to break the monotony of the sombre dominoes, when skirts swinging round disclosed faintly-shod feet or delicately-hued garments.

Rex did not dance. His heart was heavy. His thoughts with Vera. Try as he would—and Rex Darnley was not a weak man—he could not push this girl from his memory. He was standing at one time a little apart musing, when he was conscious of two men coming behind him. He knew their voices—they were Lord Vivian and Tom Watson. He could not but overhear their conversation.

"Oh! I recognised you at once," Tom was saying, lightly; "the disguise is very thin, after all."

"And I was flattering myself no one knew me," laughed the Earl. There was a moment's silence, then he said, hurriedly,—

"Have you just come from Abbey Chester?"

"About two hours ago," replied Tom.

"And how were our friends?"

"Miss Delane and Mr. Motte seemed absurdly happy. Vera was strangely quiet. Do you know I cannot rid my mind of the thought, Lord Vivian, that Vera is afraid of her father; she—"

"Afraid!" repeated the Earl, quickly, while Rex clenched his hand.

"Yes, I did not like the look of his face last night. He has not forgiven Vera for refusing this offer from London that you got her. He seemed to be half drunk and to be murmuring threats against her. She wants a protector sadly."

"I had no idea that De Mortimer was that sort of man!" exclaimed the Earl, in tones of genuine distress and vexation. "I am terribly vexed I ever brought that manager from town, but De Mortimer declared she was longing for a chance, and that was why I did it."

"I shall go back to the company again to-morrow," declared Tom, "for I confess that



[“YOUR DAUGHTER WILL NOT, I REGRET TO SAY, ACCEPT MY OFFER.”]

he looked dangerous, and Vera ought to have someone near. She—she saved my life. More, she gave me back everything that makes life bearable, and I shall henceforth dedicate my whole being to her service.”

The Earl sighed, seemed as if he would speak abruptly, and then said nothing. Tom's voice had been full of emotion as he uttered the last words; and as the two men passed on Rex Darnley stood plunged in a maze of bitter reflections, foremost of which stood the fact that Vera was farther away if possible than ever; that Tom Watson loved her, and that happiness was in store for them both.

Meanwhile, Lady Anice had been in the height of bliss; she had flitted hither and thither, followed by a score of admirers, and wherever she had gone, she had seen Sir Keith's tall form, which, though carefully hidden, she had recognised easily.

At supper time all were to unmask, and a few minutes before Lady Anice sauntered with her partner into the conservatory for rest and coolness. It was a man she cared nothing about, and her heart jumped with delight as she saw the tall form of her host follow her.

“It is coming at last,” she said to herself. She forthwith invented some excuse and sent her partner off on a wild-goose errand to find her fan, having the said commodity hidden in the folds of her domino all the while; then sank into an apparent reverie as Sir Keith approached. As he dropped into the fauteuil beside her she uttered a slight exclamation.

“Have I frightened you?” asked Sir Keith, tenderly.

“Frightened me! no, but”—demanded the coquette, archly; “how do you know who I am?”

“Know who you are,” repeated Sir Keith, passionately; “what could blind my eyes when you are present, Anice? Do you think

this flimsy wrap could disguise your loveliness?”

“You must not flatter me,” cried Lady Anice, pleased at this wooing; it was at once new and delightful.

“Flatter you! It is not flattery Anice, it is love. Oh! listen to me, my darling; I cannot live without you. Give me hope, give me but one word of hope, it will be enough for the present. I am not presumptuous; I know your worth—that you are a queen, and all men adore you. I am at my proper place, your feet. Give me one word.”

The mask was flung aside. Sir Keith lifted his handsome, noble face, flushed with the passion of his heart.

Lady Anice removed the black lace from her features. She looked down at him gently.

“I will give you no word, no hope till you rise. Your proper place is not at my feet.”

She stopped, and rose as Sir Keith sprang up too.

“No; it is here—it is at my heart!”

The acting was superb. Lady Anice looked a true angelic woman as she uttered these words in a brave, yet tenderly, low voice.

Flesh and blood could not withstand her. Sir Keith caught her in his arms, and imprisoned her in a hold like the grip of iron bonds.

“My own! my darling! my wife!” he cried madly, pouring kisses on the fair, flower face. “Oh! Anice, you don't know what this means to me. I have been tormented by doubts, yet driven wild by your nobility, your beauty. I can scarcely believe it is real. I must be dreaming.”

He half staggered back, but Lady Anice only smiled. She threw off her domino, and stood before him in all her radiance.

“Keith,” she murmured, softly, “my darling, it is no dream. See, I am here—real; your own Anice. Kiss me.”

She lifted her smiling, parted mouth as she finished, and with a passionate flood of words

Sir Keith drew her once more to his arms, and kissed her again and again.

“It is too good to be true,” he whispered after awhile, as they stood silent—he lost in his dream of bliss, she in her ambitious calculations for the future.

A gong sounding aroused them.

Lady Anice drew herself away with an exclamation,—

“Supper,” she cried, “and we all unmask! We are not there, Keith!”

“No, but we will go,” he answered, proudly.

“Come!”

He threw away his domino, and stretched out his hand; then they walked out of the conservatory into the ballroom, the guests parting to let them pass.

Lady Anice was overwhelmed with her success and her triumph. She knew she looked beautiful; she knew the hearts of many there were heavy with envy; she felt, indeed, she was a queen this night, and that all bowed before her.

The news was whispered soon, but it needed only a glance at Sir Keith's happy face as he bent before the dainty, lovely lady to know the truth of his heart and the verification of the statement that Lady Anice Druce had promised to become his wife!

(To be continued.)

A YOUNG PALM TREE.—The most beautiful thing in the tropics is a young palm tree; the old ones are more graceful than any of our foliage plants, but they all show signs of the furious winds which sometimes sweep the islands; but the young ones, so supple as to bend before the hurricanes, are the ideal of grace and loveliness. The long, spreading leaves of a vivid green bend and sway with the breeze and nod in the sunlight with a beauty one can find no words to describe. As picturesque in repose as they are graceful in motion, they fascinate the eyes of him who beholds them.





["YOU ARE THE MOST HEARTLESS WOMAN I EVER MET, BUT YOU WON'T MAKE ME BELIEVE YOU CARE NOTHING FOR ME."]

NOVELETTE.]

## MARRIED BENEATH HER.

### CHAPTER I.

"AUNT ALICE writes to say that she is coming to us for a few weeks, papa, and that she will bring Julia with her," remarked Violet Stanwick to her father, as they sat at breakfast one cold morning in January. "Julia has not been well, and Aunt Alice thinks country air will do her more good than going to the seaside."

"The fact is," said Mr. Stanwick, sarcastically, "if Julia went to the seaside it would entail extra expense, whereas coming here costs nothing beyond the railway fare. I never knew your aunt to mention her real motive for doing anything in my life, Violet. When are we to expect our self-invited guests?"

"To-morrow. They will be in time for my birthday ball on the twentieth."

"Of course. Do you suppose they have omitted to take that into consideration? The Shiftons are down to everything."

"Don't be uncharitable, papa!" cried Violet, mirthfully, as she rose from the table. "We can easily find room for them, and a little pleasure will do Julia good, poor girl! They can't afford to go out much, you know!"

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning, pet?"

"When I have discussed household matters with Mrs. Venner, I mean to drive into the village to see some of my poor people."

"I have told you repeatedly that I object to your visiting them so frequently, and listening to all their complaints and troubles," said Richard Stanwick, peevishly. "I wish you to see only the bright, sunny side of existence at present. I won't have you saddened by the sight of other people's sorrows. It's the curate's place to visit them. Goodness

knows I subscribe liberally enough to all the local charities!"

"The curate does visit them, papa, but I like to do what little I can as well," replied Violet, gently. "You speak as if I am to be exempt from all sorrow and suffering—and that is impossible!"

"They are not likely to trouble you, child," he retorted, sharply, with a vague fear in his voice. "I can protect you from them by the power of wealth. Money, Violet, is a powerful safeguard against misfortune. Possessing that, we can defy nearly all the evils to which human nature is subject!"

"Papa, don't speak in such a defiant strain," pleaded the girl, with a slight shiver. "It is like daring misfortune to come to us, and we are so happy—so very happy now!"

"Nonsense! You always were a strange girl, Violet. There's another proof of your being unlike other girls with plenty of money at command," he continued, as a rough-looking sheep-dog, with a kind, sensible, old head, and the veriest stump of a tail, entered the breakfast-room. "Instead of having a pug, or a St. Bernard, or something else that's fashionable and costs money, you attach yourself to that ridiculous old cur, and make a pet of him!"

"Dash isn't handsome, I'll admit," said Violet, fondling the ungainly favourite, "but he's the dearest old dog in the world, and the most faithful!"

Dash accepted the compliment and a biscuit at the same time.

Violet went away to hold a discussion with the housekeeper, and Richard Stanwick, adjourning to what he was pleased to call his study, settled down to an undisturbed perusal of the *Times*.

He was a self-made man—a wealthy parvenu—who, from being a mere retail tradesman, had risen to affluence late in life—too late to adapt himself himself to his changed surroundings.

He had bought Langton Hall, near Torquay,

on retiring from trade, and endeavoured to interest himself in the pursuits of an ordinary country gentleman.

But with the long-coveted wealth within his grasp, and ample leisure to enjoy it, he was very far from feeling happy.

Violet, well-educated, graceful, accustomed to refined, luxurious surroundings from childhood, felt in nowise embarrassed or ill at ease in the position she occupied. With her father it was different.

His bringing up, early associations, and the struggling years—the poverty and care he had experienced—had totally unfitted him to mingle in good society.

Why, his butler—a grand, pompous, individual, of whom he stood in secret awe—looked more like the master of Langton Hall than its real owner.

Yet Richard Stanwick was slavishly obedient to the demands of his new rank. At stated times he filled the house with guests, although he never breathed freely till they had departed.

He drank wine and praised it, when he would have revelled in a pint of porter and a "churchwarden."

Never happy or at ease save when alone with his daughter, the meagre, spare-built, little man insisted obstinately upon adhering to the pomp that caused his misery.

When the ponies came round Violet took the reins from the groom and started for the village at a brisk pace, enjoying, as only perfect health and a heart free from care can enjoy, the beauty of a clear, frosty, sombre, winter morning.

She was a very pretty girl—even other women acknowledged this reluctantly. She had dark, long-lashed, blue eyes, soft, wavy, auburn hair, small regular features, and a complexion of blended lilies and roses. The rich darkness of her fur cap and sealskin jacket enhanced her delicate warm-tinted loveliness.

The girl and the ponies, a charming pair of

dappled-grey, named Soda and Brandy, made up a picture that passers-by—especially masculine ones—regarded with feelings of profound admiration.

Violet Stanwick's heart was full of happiness as she drove into the village to visit some of her pensioners—the space beneath the carriage-seat was filled with useful gifts.

The day after to-morrow would be her nineteenth birthday.

The occasion was to be celebrated by a dinner-party and a ball.

Thanks to their wealth, the Stanwicks were well received by the county people, and their invitations seldom met with a refusal.

Violet was looking forward to this particular ball with unusual delight, blended with a little girlish shrinking, and unnatural under the circumstances.

Sir Charles Annesley, her lover, whose estate adjoined Langton Hall, would be present; and their engagement, only a fortnight old, would, as it were, become public property for the first time on the night of the ball.

Violet permitted her thoughts to rest upon it with shy, sweet pleasure.

She was in love with the handsome baronet—at least, so she firmly believed—and in her eyes he passed as the representative of noble, high-born, chivalrous manhood.

A thorough man of the world, his only debonair love-making, breathing, without any apparent effect, the very spirit of devotion for the woman he would fain honour by ranking her his wife, had won Violet's heart. No man so handsome, so gifted, so high-bred, had ever crossed her path before.

He fascinated her, and she had succumbed beneath the spell, wondering a little sometimes in her glad humility that he had thought her worthy to share his honoured name, and to go through life by his side.

There were not wanting people who declared that Annesley House and the lands belonging to it were deeply mortgaged—that only a rich marriage would enable Sir Charles to save his patrimonial acres from coming to the hammer. Others—equally charitable—hinted at the strange life he had led abroad as a young man, and the many unpleasant anecdotes coupled with this name.

But these disquieting rumours failed to reach Violet's ears.

Her father, glad to obtain a titled son-in-law, had willingly sanctioned the engagement, and no *exposé* of her lover's shortcomings had brought him down from the high pedestal upon which, in her absolute trust and fond, adoring pride, Violet had placed him.

She drove to the country station on the next day to meet her aunt and cousin. The express had arrived when she got there, and a little confusion of greetings and embraces took place between the three ladies. Then Mrs. Shifton and Julia followed Violet into the carriage, the lilliputian groom jumped up behind, and the ponies' heads were turned in the direction of home.

Mrs. Shifton was a well-preserved, middle-aged lady, with a quantity of brown hair not all her own—save in the sense that she had paid for it—a fixed colour, and a sweet, perpetual smile, which those who knew her intimately averred was not to be accepted as a proof of unbroken amiability.

Her husband was a struggling barrister, and his wife's ambition to shine in society did not tend to lessen his pecuniary anxieties. With six daughters and a very small income Mrs. Shifton endeavoured to keep up with people whose means greatly exceeded her own, regardless of the humiliating shifts and contrivances to which she was compelled to resort.

Julia, her eldest daughter, was the beauty of the family. She possessed a certain haughty, defiant style of good looks, on the strength of which her mother had predicted a success for her when she first came out. But Julia had been out several seasons now, and an eligible *parti* seemed as far off as ever. Her want of

fortune kept all but detrimentals at a distance.

Had she been brought up under different circumstances Julia might have developed into a noble, gracious woman. As it was, the atmosphere of petty deceit and subterfuge in which she existed had rendered her bitter and cynical.

She banished it from her soul, although she could not escape from it. Julia was painfully aware of the advantages Violet enjoyed as contrasted with her own, and a dislike, almost amounting to hatred, had grown up in her heart for her wealthy, beautiful cousin.

"I hope the short notice I gave you of our coming has not put you to any inconvenience, my dearest Violet," said Mrs. Shifton, effusively; "I would be so sorry if that were the case. Julia professed Brighton, but I knew the country air would do her more good. Laura and Bessie pleaded hard to be allowed to come with us, but I would not hear of it. It would have been imposing upon your hospitality."

"You have not put me to any inconvenience, auntie," Violet replied, simply. "It was a pity to disappoint Bessie and Laura. I could have found room for them as well."

"I might write to them to join us in a few days, then?" said Mrs. Shifton, who had intended doing so all along. "Now I want to know all about your engagement, my dear. I was so delighted to hear of it." She had burst into tears and stormed at her own girls for being still unmarried. "Sir Charles belongs to one of the best families in the county, and he is such a distinguished-looking, handsome fellow. We met him last year at Lady Vavasour's ball. You remember the tall, fine, fair-haired man who danced with you several times, Julia?"

"There were so many men of that description present, mamma, that I can hardly be expected to single Sir Charles out from among the rest," said Julia, languidly, determined to evince but slight interest in Violet's engagement, which had already cost her a sharp pang of envy.

"I believe the Annesley estate is somewhat encumbered," said Mrs. Shifton, snavely; "but doubtless things will come right when once you are married. Have you decided when the wedding is to take place?"

"In about six months, I believe," faltered Violet, blushing. "Sir Charles is rather an impatient wooer. I shall want Julia to act as my principal bridesmaid."

"With pleasure, unless I become a bride myself before then," said Julia, quietly; "and that is not very likely. We portionless damsels get passed by. It is only heiresses, like yourself, who obtain husbands so quickly, Violet."

Julia knew how to send her little poisoned arrows home to their destination with unerring skill. Never before had Violet doubted the disinterested nature of the baronet's love for her. Those words "heiresses like yourself" rankled in her mind, unsuspicious as it was, and refused to be expelled.

"In six months' time?" said Mrs. Shifton, sweetly. "Then your marriage will take place in the summer, my love. I suppose you will go on the Continent to spend your honeymoon. Sir Charles is well-known at Monaco. You must not allow him to go near the tables."

"Do you mean to imply that Sir Charles is a gambler, Aunt Alice?" asked Violet, sharply, despising that lady's vague hints, and determined for once to bring her to the point.

"My dearest child, no; I meant nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Shifton, feigning lest she had gone too far. "Many people play who are not habitual gamblers. But, of course, after his marriage Sir Charles will give up all these bachelor delights, and settle down to a quiet domestic life upon his own estate."

When Mrs. Shifton and Julia had arrived at the Hall, and gone to their respective rooms, Violet, thankful to be alone for half-an-hour,

went into the library, and took up a volume of Shelley, which she turned over without reading.

That short conversation on the way back from the station had sown doubt and suspicion in her mind.

Was there any truth in the statement that Sir Charles was so fond of Monaco, or in the still more cruel hint that her fortune formed her principal attraction in his eyes?

Violet's noble, generous nature blamed her for harboring such unjust thoughts against one whom she had hitherto regarded as the incarnation of honour and disinterested love; yet she could not wholly banish them. They subdued the delicate bloom off her happiness, and gave rise to a feeling of vague insecurity.

She looked radiantly lovely on the night of her birthday as she floated downstairs to welcome her guests, dressed in robes of filmy blue, clasped here and there with pearls—pearls confining her wavy, abundant tresses of brown hair.

Sir Charles Annesley, a tall fair man, with fine grey eyes and a drooping moustache, way-laid her at the foot of the wide oak staircase, and drew her with him into the conservatory.

"My birthday present, darling!" he explained, as he clasped a splendid diamond bracelet on her round white arm, regarding her fondly and proudly the while. "How lovely you are to-night, my Violet! You will outshine every other woman present, and that, as heiress, is not fair, although I am well pleased that it should be so."

"Charles, you will laugh at me when you hear what I am about to say," began Violet, timidly. "Sometimes I am foolish enough to fear that the course of our love has run too smoothly to last. We have met with no difficulties, and you know the old proverb says that is never the case with true love."

"Would you throw a doubt upon ours because there is no tyrannical father, no intriguing mother, to come between us and thwart our happiness?" said the Baronet, lightly.

"Not exactly. Only I read in an old book the other day that poverty and sorrow are the tests by which true love is proved. I wonder if the writer spoke from experience?"

"He may have done," said Sir Charles, carelessly. "Poverty and love in a four-roomed cottage, though, one sees to most advantage on the stage. They don't work well in real life. The unpaid butcher's bill and the rent for 'the love of a cottage' six months behind soon cause husband and wife to discover faults in each other unnoticed before, and to regret their rash, ill-advised proceeding in getting married upon next to nothing a-year."

"Will you promise not to be offended if I ask you a question?" said Violet, with a great sinking at heart caused by his words.

"Certainly."

"Would—would you have asked me to be your wife if instead of being what I am—the heiress of Langton Hall—I had been only a poor governess, or a companion with a pitiful salary?" she said, earnestly, putting the question to him in the frank sincerity of her nature.

In spite of his promise not to be offended a slight frown darkened the baronet's face.

"Why trouble yourself and me with such foolish suppositions, Violet?" he said, reproachfully. "You are not a poor governess, or companion, thank Heaven! In any position I could not have failed to admire you, *ma belle*, although circumstances must always govern a man to a certain extent in his choice of a wife. If you talk thus I shall think that you have lost faith in me. You have not. Then I will forgive you, and take my compensation in kisses. Come, darling, or your guests will wonder what has happened to delay you."

Violet went down, but the sunny smile had left her eyes, and a chill north wind seemed to have slammed the door upon her recent unsuspecting happiness.



## CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING was amiss with her father. Violet came to this conclusion a few days after the birthday ball. He looked worn and haggard; he was constantly receiving letters and telegrams from town, and his manner became daily more peevish and unreasonable.

He would never consent to discuss business matters with his daughter. Any attempt on her part to win his confidence met with a repulse.

Had he been speculating rashly with his large fortune in the attempt to double it? Richard Stanwick was inordinately fond of money, and he had once or twice made a remark in Violet's hearing that rendered this supposition of hers not unlikely to be true.

Even Violet, who knew but little of such things, was aware that a great financial crisis, an epoch in the history of the Stock Exchange and the Paris Bourse, had arrived. Several well-known old-established houses had stopped payment; more than one bank had succumbed beneath the pressure brought to bear upon it. The daily papers were constantly announcing some fresh failure, and increasing the panic among investors, large and small.

Was her father involved to any great extent in these disastrous enterprises? Violet tried to ascertain, but Richard Stanwick gave her only ambiguous replies.

Women, in his opinion, were not capable of understanding business matters; besides, he did not care to acknowledge how rashly he had speculated with his large capital.

"Go away now, my dear," he said, wearily, when Violet entered his study, where he sat in front of a table littered with papers, and sought to draw from him some explicit information with regard to the anxiety that evidently oppressed him. "I cannot explain my business transactions to you, Violet; they are much too complicated for your little head. Yes, I have had some losses lately, but not to any great extent. I shall retrieve them again presently; I must, I cannot fail to do so. Go away now, I am busy. I will join you in the drawing-room later on."

And Violet was compelled to leave him, feeling dissatisfied and uneasy. Surely small losses would not have produced such an effect upon him! Was some terrible trouble looming cloud-like over them in the immediate distance?

Going to her father's study one morning to ask him to write a cheque for household expenses a terrible cry rang through the house, startling all who heard it.

The guests of both sexes, and all the servants, from the pompos butler to the little kitchen-maid, rushed in the direction of the study.

They found Violet sitting on the floor, holding her father's grey head in her lap. He had been stretched on the floor insensible with an open telegram lying beside him when she entered the study.

The hastily summoned doctor declared Richard Stanwick to have had a paralytic stroke of a very severe kind. Speechless and senseless he was removed to his room, Violet acting as his sole nurse.

Mrs. Shifton, pale and frightened at this terrible visitation which had befallen her brother-in-law, picked up the telegram which had fallen from his hand, and read it.

She could not understand the technical terms in which the message was couched, but she gathered from them that one at least of Richard Stanwick's investments had proved a total failure, involving many others in ruin. Ruin! Surely that hateful word was not to be thought of in connection with prosperous Richard Stanwick?

What could have induced the once cautious man to change his safe investments for such mad, headlong speculation?

But Richard Stanwick was not in a condition to be questioned with regard to his doings. He lay there stricken to death in the shaded

room, with his daughter, full of grief and sympathy, watching over him.

The people staying at Langton Hall wisely departed, leaving its owners undisturbed in their new sorrow. Sir Charles Annesley came every day, but Violet scarcely saw him; she could not leave the sick room save for a few moments, and her lover had to fall back upon Mrs. Shifton for news and some insight into the real state of affairs.

Sir Charles was becoming very anxious. Rumour said that Richard Stanwick was ruined. The failure of a gigantic mining speculation, that was to have converted the shareholders into millionaires, following hard upon other losses, had dragged the rich man down.

Should this prove true, Violet, instead of being an heiress, would come to her husband absolutely unendowed, as it were, depending upon him for voluntary contributions. A nice look-out this for an embarrassed man with a mortgaged estate, which he had hoped to redeem by means of a wealthy marriage.

Sir Charles cursed his ill-luck, swore at Richard Stanwick under his breath for being such a mad fool, and waited as patiently as he could for the unpromising dénouement.

It was not long in arriving. Richard Stanwick revived a little on the fourth day from his seizure, and recognised his daughter.

"How long have I been ill, Violet?" he inquired, feebly.

"Four days, papa dearest," she replied, bending over him fondly. "Oh, papa, papa! losing her self-control, "try to love for my sake! I cannot bear to lose you!"

Richard Stanwick shook his grey head.

"I am going, Violet," he said, brokenly. "This blow has been too much for me. To lose all, every penny, after such long years of working and saving in order to amass money! I would far rather die than face poverty again. It is of you I am thinking, child, not of myself. Like my investments, I shall very soon be a dead failure; but you? Oh, my Violet, that I should have brought you to this! I sought to double the fortune you would inherit, whereas I have madly flung it all away, and left you penniless. Can you forgive me, child?"

"There can be no question of forgiveness between us, dear," said Violet, pressing her fresh young cheek against his withered one. "You have always been the kindest and best of fathers. You would not have risked your hard-earned money but for me. Do not let the thought of it distress your mind any longer. Let us talk of something else."

"I can't, Violet. I must make some provision for you ere I die. Tell them to send at once for Perry. We ought between us to scratch enough from such a colossal wreck to provide for you. There is time to be lost. Send for him at once; and I should also like to see Sir Charles Annesley."

Long before Mr. Perry, Richard Stanwick's solicitor, could reach Langton Hall its owner had breathed his last; and Violet, locked in her own room, was sobbing her heart out in the first bitterness of her first real sorrow, refusing to be consoled.

When the quiet funeral was over, and Richard Stanwick's affairs were thoroughly gone into, his bankruptcy was established beyond doubt.

In the hope of retrieving his losses by one lucky coup he had continued to speculate, and fortune had been persistently against him. The mining affair had only served to complete a ruin already begun.

He was deeply in debt, too. Langton Hall would have to be sold in order to cover the dead man's liabilities. There would be nothing for Violet to inherit of all the fortune that her father had amassed.

Unless friends were kind enough to offer her a shelter she would have to go out into the world to earn her own living. Richard Stanwick's wealth had exploded like a great wind-bag, leaving only emptiness behind.

Mrs. Shifton undertook to acquaint Violet

with the sad change in her circumstances. She did not wish the girl to become a burden upon her, and, with her usual keen, worldly wisdom, she determined to keep Sir Charles Annesley true to his engagement as the best means of providing for Violet.

Mrs. Shifton made her way to Violet's boudoir, a charming little room, upholstered in peacock-blue velvet, with peacock-feather decorations.

Violet was sitting by the fire, gazing into its depths with weary, wistful eyes, her delicate beauty gaining a fresh charm from her dark mourning robes.

She was so unused to sorrow, poor child, that when it came and took her by the hand she could have cried out as if suffering a cruel injustice.

Only those whom sorrow never leaves understand how to bear its grim presence without a murmur.

"Did your father ever admit to you that he was in difficulties, Violet?" said Mrs. Shifton, presently. "Mr. Perry tells me that his affairs are in a dreadfully complicated condition."

"He would never tell me anything till he was on his death-bed," said Violet, sadly. "Then he acknowledged that he had lost a great deal of money, that I should be very poorly off when all claims had been met. But what does it matter? If there is enough for me to live upon I shall be content."

"My dear, you may as well know the worst at once," continued Mrs. Shifton, sensibly. "It is useless to keep you in ignorance of it. Langton Hall will have to be sold, and when the creditors are paid there will be no balance remaining over for you. Indeed, the sale of the estate will not cover the liabilities incurred. You will be absolutely penniless, Violet, without either home or income."

The girl's fair face blanched as she heard this, the tears sprang to her eyes. She had not anticipated such utter ruin.

"What is to become of me, auntie?" she said, mournfully.

"My home will be yours until you are married," replied Mrs. Shifton, suavely. "I have told Sir Charles this, and—and he quite approves of the arrangement."

"But my poverty may have the effect of cancelling my engagement," said Violet, bitterly. "It was an heiress when Sir Charles proposed to me, I am only a pauper now. The change may not be without its effect upon him."

"Nonsense, Violet," retorted Mrs. Shifton, quickly. "He is bound in honour to make you his wife. He cannot avoid doing so unless you give him a loophole, and permit him to escape. I sincerely hope that no foolish high-flown ideas will prevent you from holding him to his word."

"And marrying him against his will!" said Violet, quietly. "What a desirable future you are planning for me, dear aunt!"

"A better one than you can expect to have if you let him go. Apart from your marriage you have simply no prospects, Violet. Your own welfare is at issue, and if you refuse to act in a sensible manner, to become Lady Annesley, I really don't know what is to become of you, without a penny to call your own."

With this cheering remark Mrs. Shifton swept from the room, leaving Violet to digest her words at leisure.

A sharper pain pierced the girl's desolate heart as she sat there motionless, still gazing into the fire.

Sir Charles, as her affianced husband, was very dear to her. Willingly would she have thrown herself into his arms to be sheltered there had she but been sure of his love under such widely-altered circumstances remaining unchanged.

This assurance, however, was far from being hers. He had once alluded in disparaging terms to a poor marriage, and branded it as a folly. Violet knew of his pecuniary embarrassments now; he had himself alluded to

them since her father's death, while his manner towards her had lacked its usual loverlike warmth.

Keep him to his engagement against his will in order to provide herself with a home? Never! Violet's dark eyes flashed scornfully as her aunt's advice recurred to her. Anything but that. She would ascertain the truth ere long from his own lips. If her surmise proved correct, and he wished to be released from his engagement, she would restore his freedom without a reproachful word, and face the world with one illusion the less. Love! Did it really exist, save in the hearts of fathers and mothers? The poor counterfeit others offered her was unworthy of that sublime name.

Violet watched her opportunity. Taking advantage of the astute Mrs. Shifton's absence from the drawing-room one day when Sir Charles called, she nerved herself to the painful task of probing his love, and ascertaining his wishes with regard to their engagement.

"Langton Hall is to be sold," she began, quietly. "I suppose you are aware of that? I am going home with my aunt for the present. It is kind of her to take me, since I have no longer any means of my own."

"It's a wretched state of affairs," said the Baronet, gloomily. "I wouldn't mind if I were not so awfully hard-up for money myself, Violet. But for both of us to be poor is—er—"

"Extremely embarrassing," said Violet, finishing his sentence for him. "On that account, perhaps, we had better agree to cancel our engagement. Your aversion to poverty is well-known to me. In my own person I am not afraid of it, but I have no desire to inflict it upon you against your will. I shall not hold you to your promise to marry me, Sir Charles, since my position has altered greatly for the worse, and I am no longer that enviable being, an heiress."

If she had secretly hoped for an indignant, loving disavowal of all mercenary motives, a refusal to accept the freedom thus offered to him from the baronet, she was bitterly disappointed.

In spite of his attempt to conceal it, a relieved expression crossed Sir Charles's fair, handsome, high-bred face.

"Violet, my poor generous darling!" he stammered. "I would fain make you my wife, regardless of circumstances. I love you, upon my soul I do, as I have never loved any other woman. If I avail myself of your offer it is because I am powerless to act independently, and in accordance with my own wishes. I—"

"Excuses are unnecessary," said Violet, with a little quiver of mingled scorn and sorrow in her voice.

Her idol had fallen with a crash, exposing his clay feet and general unworthiness to her disenchanted eyes.

"Henceforth," she continued, "our paths will lie far apart. We are not likely to meet again. You will take that back," slipping off her engagement ring, "and our projected union will take its place among the events that were not to be. Knowing what I do now I hardly regret it, although I have bought my knowledge very dear."

"You despise me as a fortune-hunter," said the Baronet, angrily. He loved her as much as his selfish, worldly nature would permit of. It annoyed and pained him to lose her, especially under circumstances reflecting more or less upon his honour. Yet his love was not strong enough to keep him true to her in the face of adverse fortune. Being the one in fault of course he lost his temper, and assumed an injured air.

"Not altogether," she replied, frankly. "You would have married me had I asked you to do so from a sense of honour, but I could not permit that. I release you from your promise very willingly, Sir Charles. There is no reason why we should part bad friends."

"Even now," he began, remorsefully, "it

is not too late to reconsider your determination."

"That would be folly, unless one could blot out what has just transpired. Good-bye, I will not detain you any longer. You may leave me to inform my aunt that our engagement is at an end."

Mrs. Shifton's wrath, on learning what her niece had thought proper to do, was intense. Never before had she addressed Violet in such angry, plain-spoken terms. It was the girl's first experience of her changed position, and the many unpleasant attributes belonging to it.

"I can offer you a home for the present, Violet," she wound up by saying spitefully; "but I cannot promise to do so always. You have chosen to stand in your own light, and lose the chance of marrying well when it was yours. Girls who do such things must expect to rough it when they have no resources of their own."

"I shall not trouble you long, aunt," replied Violet, proudly. "It would grieve me to be a burden upon your hospitality; and no woman, capable of earning her own living, can truthfully be said to lack resources."

### CHAPTER III.

THE house in Belgravia to which, a few weeks later on, Violet accompanied her aunt and cousin, was anything but an abode of domestic bliss.

The comfort of the entire household was sacrificed in order to maintain an imposing external appearance—to live in the same style as people possessing treble their income.

The petty shifts and often mean devices resorted to in order to accomplish this grand aim fairly astonished Violet.

The most importunate tradespeople were paid a little on account; the servants' wages were always more or less in arrears. When unusually hard-pressed Mrs. Shifton had frequently gone on a begging errand to her wealthy brother-in-law. Now this source had failed her, and she knew not where to look for another when her funds should once more be at a low ebb.

Violet, on arriving, was welcomed kindly by her uncle, a worn, harassed-looking man, and the only member of the Shifton family who really liked her.

Bella, Maud, Laura, and Bessie Shifton, insipid young ladies with fair fluffy hair and very light blue eyes, gave their cousin but a cool reception.

Younger and fairer than themselves, coming to them under such altered circumstances, Violet's advent could hardly have been more undesirable. Ethel, a precocious dark-eyed girl of eleven, took an early opportunity of airing her sisters' sentiments upon this point in Violet's hearing.

Hitherto Violet had always visited the Shiftons in the character of a favoured, petted guest. The best bedroom had been assigned to her, and the various petty domestic shifts and contrivances had been kept carefully in the background.

But, on this occasion, she was quick to perceive the distinction drawn between the heiress and the penniless dependent woman she had become.

The room set aside for her was a dreary little place not far from the attic, commanding an extensive chimney-pot prospect. When she had washed her hands and brushed her hair Violet went down to join the others in the drawing-room. She heard with surprise a list of domestic grievances that Bella, the housekeeper during her mother's absence, was pouring into that lady's ear. Nothing of the kind had ever been alluded to in her presence before.

Dinner was a scrambling, uncomfortable meal, at which the fish came up almost in a state of nature, Mrs. Shifton sending it away, quite as a matter of course, to undergo a second frying. The young ladies wrangled

with each other perpetually, and bitter little speeches flew across the table like squibs.

The Misses Shifton could appear amiable and loving when company was present, but among themselves they were the most disagreeable, jealous girls living.

Feeling weary after her long journey Violet withdrew long before the usual hour for retiring from the domestic circle, and sought the shelter of her own room.

And then she began to unpack some of the boxes and portmanteaus that littered it. Till now her maid had always performed that duty. Finding it devolve upon herself Violet set about it with sudden, feverish energy, as if she feared to let her mind dwell upon the past till she was stronger and better able to face her new position in all its hard reality.

From the idolised daughter, the beloved young mistress whom everyone gladly obeyed, the head of her father's large establishment, she had become a needy, impoverished, obscure woman, the least important member of an unhappy, ill-regulated household. Such a terrible and unexpected reverse might have crushed a weaker nature; but Violet's temperament was strong and elastic, likely to rebound in time, even from the cruel blow she had sustained.

She had brought many pretty trifles with her from Langton Hall. These she arranged tastefully about the dingy room, rendering it more homelike and pleasant in appearance.

She unpacked a miniature strong-box, made of oak and clasped with steel. Unlocking it, Violet counted the money it contained.

Her father had always given her a liberal allowance, and she had spent it freely. Sometimes, however, there had remained a small balance in hand, which she assigned to the strong box, little dreaming how precious the money thus saved would one day be to her.

Twenty pounds, odd shillings! Well, it was not much, but with even this small resource at command she was not wholly dependent upon the Shiftons. Then she had several articles of jewellery which, if realised, would produce far more than twenty pounds.

A little comforted by this inventory of her worldly goods Violet went to bed, and enjoyed the deep, dreamless rest that not unfrequently follows excessive grief or fatigue.

It was very late ere she emerged from her room the next morning and descended to the breakfast-room in her simple black dress, relieved at the throat and wrists by frills of white lace.

Breakfast was still on the table, although empty egg-shells and dirty cups proved that the meal was virtually over.

Bessie, who was lounging in an easy chair reading a French novel when her cousin entered the room, rang the bell and told the sulky servant who answered it to bring fresh coffee and toast. She received Violet's apology for being late with tolerable good grace, and then went on with her novel.

Violet was trifling with some ham upon her plate—her healthy country appetite having forsaken her—when Mrs. Shifton appeared in a morning wrapper, and a cap considerably the worse for wear.

"Good-morning, Violet. I hope you slept well last night," she said, rather coldly. "I did not send your breakfast up, because I never like to encourage young people in idle habits. Bessie," turning to her daughter, "I have repeatedly asked you to superintend Ethel's music-lessons. The poor child is playing her exercises in frightful style, while you sit here reading. It is really too bad of you."

"I can't teach Ethel, mamma," said Bessie, carelessly. "She pays no attention to what I say. She is a tiresome, self-willed monkey. I don't believe any one could teach her."

"She is not tiresome," retorted Mrs. Shifton, angrily, "only you and Bella are too indolent to save me the expense of a music-master. Violet, my dear," she continued, "you are a good musician, and I think you possess some



patience. You would oblige me by giving Ethel a music-lesson every day. She is dreadfully backward, and masters charge so frightfully if you engage them. Perhaps you will spend an hour with her this morning, and then you can write some letters for me that must go by the next post."

It was evident that Mrs. Shifton did not intend her niece to remain long unemployed. Violet saw this, but she determined as long as she remained with her aunt to make no protest.

Rising from the breakfast-table she went to the dingy little room where Ethel was banging away at the old school-room piano with energy worthy of a better cause.

After a brief struggle for the supremacy, Ethel was compelled to acknowledge her cousin's stronger will, and to accept her instruction. Unlike Bessie, Violet did not call her "a horrid little wretch" when she became rebellious. She only insisted quietly upon Ethel's doing as she was told, and the end of that music-lesson was an improvement on its commencement.

While Violet was writing her aunt's letters Mrs. Shifton was called away to hold an interview in the front hall with a stout, red-faced man, who insisted on the immediate settlement of that there little bill which had been so long standing.

Mrs. Shifton paid him something on account, and got rid of him, treating the matter as if it were an ordinary everyday occurrence. Then she sailed away to the work-room, where a shabby female in black and her own hard-worked maid were putting the mourning dresses together, with a little desultory help from Bella and Laura.

A few outlets warmed up from last night's dinner, some watery potatoes, and the remains of a fossilized pudding, constituted the luncheon.

Mrs. Shifton would have deemed it a clear waste of time and money to provide a more comfortable meal for her family when no guests were expected. Mr. Shifton did not come home for luncheon. He went to his club instead, and Violet secretly envied him.

They were waited upon by Mrs. Shifton's new footman—an importation from the country upon which that lady prided herself vastly. The housemaid was his sister, and through her Mrs. Shifton had become aware that Timothy Hogben, then a ploughman, had a burning desire to distinguish himself as a London footman.

Ascertaining that he was tall and well-grown, Mrs. Shifton had consented to take the ambitious youth on trial. She paid him only page-boy's wages, since he was quite ignorant of his new duties, while in return she secured the services of "six feet of tall footman," as Dickens aptly describes it.

Timothy, rechristened John, was a fresh-coloured, broad-shouldered, unsophisticated young man, not over-burdened with intelligence.

Mary must have coached her pupil well upon his arrival from the country with a big box and a bundle tied up in a checked handkerchief. He waited lunch without committing any solecisms, although, being in a high state of nervousness, he rattled the plate and glass like castanets, and narrowly escaped coming into the room head first, preceded by a flying dish, through Bella's poodle getting between his legs.

"Quite an acquisition," said Mrs. Shifton, in a tone of self-congratulation, when John had retired to the lower regions. The new footman was another proof of her domestic acumen and genius for keeping up the best possible appearance at the least possible cost.

"We may as well bring some of the dress-making down to the drawing-room, girls," she continued, "and get on with it ourselves. It will all save expense. John," after ringing for that promising domestic, "if any ladies or gentlemen call this afternoon you are to say that we are not at home."

John stared aghast at this command.

Mrs. Shifton, thinking he had not properly understood her, impatiently repeated it.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he stammered, "but be I to say you're not at home when you're sittin' up here all the while? Be I to do that?"

"Certainly," said his mistress. "It is the customary thing when a lady does not wish to receive visitors. You will understand this when you have been longer in town."

"I can't do it, ma'am," said John, firmly. "I promised person before I left home that if every body else in London told lies I wouldn't. I don't mind telling anybody as calls that you don't want to see them just at present, that it's not convenient, and they must come again. But to tell a downright lie I can't do it," repeated John, heroically, "and so I tell you plainly, ma'am."

The girls stared and laughed at this incarnation of morality in plum-coloured livery. Mrs. Shifton flew into a towering passion.

"Do you mean to say that you refuse to obey my orders?" she demanded, angrily.

"Yes, ma'am, if so be as it's to give that message, sorry as I am to offend you. You see, it ain't true."

"Go downstairs, and tell your sister to come to me at once."

John disappeared in a state of great trepidation to be replaced by his sister. Mrs. Shifton proceeded to inform the latter that unless her brother became alive to the nice distinction between a conventional lie, sanctioned by custom, and an ordinary one, he would return to his native village in less time than it had taken to get him away from it.

The uncomfortable, scrambling day seemed as if it would never come to an end. Violet felt that it would be impossible for her to go on living with the Shiftons for any length of time.

The quiet insolence of the elder girls, their frequent careless, unfeeling allusions to her great loss, and her aunt's cold, loveless manner intensified day by day. As plainly as possible they intimated that Violet was one too many amongst them.

Her high spirit and sensitive heart could ill-brook such treatment as this.

Without saying anything to her relatives Violet scanned the columns of the *Times* every morning to see if any situation were advertised likely to suit her. Governess or companion, which should it be? Of two evils the companionship seemed the lesser. In that capacity she would not be called upon to teach a lot of unruly children, while she would enjoy the pleasant sense of independency belong to those who earn their own living.

Violet answered several advertisements without getting a reply. She was beginning to despair of success when she received a letter from a lady residing at Rose Villa, Blackheath, whose advertisement for a companion she had promptly responded to.

Miss Massinger proved to be a tall, thin, acidulated maiden lady of uncertain age. The salary she offered Violet was small, the duties required of her were heavy. They included reading aloud for so many hours each day, combing the Skye terrier, and feeding the parrot.

In her anxiety to get away from the Shiftons Violet made light of these drawbacks, and accepted the situation. Mrs. Shifton made some protest on learning what she had done, and even pretended to be angry. But the pretence was so obvious that Violet felt more glad than ever at the idea of leaving her unkind, time-serving relatives for absolute strangers.

"What a change for you, Vi!" Julia, observed, half-compassionately, half-scornfully, on the night previous to her cousin's departure. "You will never be able to adapt yourself to the requirements of a fidgety old woman, brought up as you have been."

"Yes, I shall," said Violet, firmly, her dark blue eyes full of hope and courage. "I mean to conquer circumstances, Julia. I will never be their slave."

"Well, I hope you will succeed," replied the other in a different tone. "You deserve to. I know you have not been happy while staying with us—that we have driven you away. The girls, take them all round, are hateful; you can't detest them more than I do, and my own temper is the reverse of angelic. I used to envy you, Violet, in your prosperous days, and now I am almost inclined to envy you your bright, brave independent spirit that enables you to bear your reverses so well. I wish I resembled you a little more in some things. Will you write to me now and then to say how you are getting on?"

Violet promised to do so, and the two cousins parted on friendly terms with each other for the first time in their lives.

#### CHAPTER IV.

BUT for the satisfaction involved in earning her own living Violet would have found it impossible to remain with Miss Massinger longer than the probationary month.

Unfortunately for the lonely, friendless girl her new home was no improvement upon the old one. Miss Massinger turned out to be as undesirable a companion as any of the Shiftons.

Violet satisfied herself of this ere she had been at Blackheath a week, and her heart sank within her as she contemplated the grey, hopeless future that stretched out before her. Yet she determined to bear with Miss Massinger's peculiarities as long as possible rather than endure the humiliation of a return to her aunt's inhospitable roof.

Here, at least, she was giving service for money received, while at her aunt's she was at everybody's beck and call from morning to night, working hard, yet regarded as an expensive incumbrance. To have her position clearly defined was in itself an advantage.

Miss Massinger belonged to an extreme dissenting sect. She included amusements of all kinds in one sweeping condemnation. Novels were hateful to her, balls and theatres were unmentionable subjects, never alluded to save for the purpose of being villified. Popery was a stock bogey, kept in reserve for an occasional "shy" whenever Miss Massinger felt in the mood for it.

Her thin, narrow, unemotional nature felt no craving for healthy change and recreation. Consequently she ranked among those undesirable persons who—

"Compound for sins they have a mind to  
By damning those they're not inclined to."

Scandal, bad-temper, and extreme parsimony were not regarded by Miss Massinger as things to be avoided. At any rate, she indulged in them freely, both at home and abroad.

She had a weakness for meetings; indeed, she may have been said to live in a perpetual state of meeting. From welcoming back a missionary, who had escaped figuring as a spare dish on a barbaric sideboard, to discussing how and when the millennium might be expected to arrive, nothing in the shape of a meeting came amiss to her.

Violet was always expected to accompany her employer on these occasions. Oh! the long, dreary speeches, unenlivened by a single gleam of wit, she had to listen to week after week, in a spirit of mute rebellion.

Used to a wider and more enlightened mode of life, a genial, cultured atmosphere, Violet soon sickened of the narrow routine, the self-satisfied, all-condemning sectarianism that surrounded her.

For years after she had quitted Miss Massinger's house Violet never saw a chapel notice-board containing some allusion to Martin Luther and a tea-meeting without a shudder.

But the meetings and the long, dull evenings spent in Miss Massinger's little drab drawing-room were not the worst evils she had to encounter.

Miss Massinger had a nephew, a clerk in the Home Office, who frequently paid her a visit. The maiden lady was well-off, and this fact may have accounted in a measure for Cecil Harrington's unflinching performance of the duty he owed to his elderly aunt.

He was at Rose Villa two or three times a week, seldom arriving empty-handed. Miss Massinger's domestic economy was very pronounced. Her nephew knew her weakness; and little presents of fruit and game, with other reasonable delicacies, saving her purse while gratifying her palate, kept her in high good humour, and increased his chance of finding the way to a prominent place in her will.

Like Sir Charles Annesley, Cecil Harrington was tall and fair; but there the likeness between the two men ended. A more vapid dandy than the Home Office clerk it would have been hard to find. His grey eyes and regular, blond features were perfectly expressionless. His drooping moustache, with a suspicion of sandiness about it, concealed a sensual upper lip. His fellow-clerks called him "Dolly," and, somehow, the name suited him admirably.

The run upon Cecil Harrington's intellectual faculties at the Home Office could not have been great. Otherwise it must have met with the announcement of "No assets."

He could play billiards; he could stare with languid insolence at a pretty woman; and his knowledge of slang—fashionable slang—was unlimited.

Violet, accustomed to associate with men of a very different stamp, regarded Cecil Harrington with ill-concealed scorn and aversion. His aunt, on the contrary, adored him. He had but one fault in her eyes—he always pleaded a previous engagement when she wanted him to go to a meeting.

By dint of keeping his worldly propensities carefully in the background when at Rose Villa, and simulating an interest in his aunt's pursuits, Cecil Harrington maintained his hold upon her favour, and won golden opinions for himself as a "serious" young man in an age of universal frivolity.

Above all things Miss Massinger was anxious that her nephew should marry well. Like Tennyson's "Northern Farmer," she exhorted him never to marry for money, but to love where there was money; and, to do him justice, Cecil Harrington seemed quite willing to act upon such excellent advice.

Miss Massinger had even selected a desirable partner for him in the person of Hester Brown, a plain, homely, frank-spoken girl, the daughter of a rich tallow-chandler, when Violet arrived upon the scene, and threatened, unconsciously, to interfere with the satisfactory matrimonial programme the spinster had drawn up.

"Dolly," or Cecil, committed himself by falling in love with his aunt's companion, and pressing his unwelcome suit upon her whenever he got a chance.

Violet's rare beauty had fascinated him, and his armour of self-conceit was too thick for the light arrows of her scornful wit and marked indifference to pierce it.

"By Jove, though, you do behave badly to a fellow, Miss Stanwick!" he remarked one day in an injured tone, first taking care to ascertain that his aunt was not within hearing. "You won't let him make love to you when he's dying to do so."

"Certainly not," said Violet, going on with her work—an old woman's flannel petticoat—and trying hard not to laugh.

Cecil Harrington's attachment, although it annoyed her, had something sublimely ridiculous about it, which appealed to her keen sense of humour.

"You are afraid lest Aunt Margaret should hear of it, and give you the sack," said Cecil, elegantly, caressing his long moustache. "Well, she might. I know she expects me to do great things in the marrying line, and she'd be awfully savage if she thought I had thrown the handkerchief to you. Never mind.

We can hoodwink her for the present, and carry on our love-making without the dear old lady's knowledge. It would never do to offend her, you know. She's got no end of money in the funds, and I am her favourite nephew. But there's nothing to prevent us from forming a secret—"

"Mr. Harrington," interrupted Violet, indignantly, "I am not afraid of anyone. If I refuse to accept or to permit your advances it is because I care nothing for you. I would far rather live and die an old maid than become your wife. After this plain speaking on my part I hope you will cease to annoy me with any proofs of affection, so-called."

"You don't mean that," said Cecil Harrington, incredulously.

That any woman could possibly fail to admire him had never crossed what he was pleased to call his mind.

"I do, indeed, I wonder," scornfully, "that you are not afraid of my betraying your indiscreet liking for me to Miss Brown."

"She be hanged! I wouldn't marry a girl who reeks of tallow to please a dozen aunts. Violet, you might say that you care just a little for me. I really am awfully fond of you. I lie awake at night trying to think how I could increase my income if Aunt Margaret were eventually to cut up rough. We must try to avoid that if possible, though. Authorship occurred to me; and I went to a literary friend of mine to see if he could furnish me with a central idea; just to give me a start, you know."

"And what did he say?"

"Oh! the brute laughed; positively laughed, and said that a man who had to go round begging for a central idea had better shut up shop as an author, and try some other line."

"What sensible advice!"

"Oh! you think so, do you? You are the most heartless woman I ever met! But you won't make me believe that you care nothing for me. Women always say that at first, and come round afterwards. Violet, darling—"

"For pity's sake be quiet, sir! Miss Massinger is coming."

She bit her lip to avoid laughing at the swift, noiseless manner in which Cecil Harrington glided back to his chair, fearful of being discovered by his aunt in the act of making love to her companion.

When Miss Massinger entered the room he had disappeared from sight behind the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, and Violet was stitching away industriously at the flannel petticoat.

In the midst of her sadness and discomfort Violet's thoughts often recurred to Langton Hall and the pleasant, luxurious existence that had once been hers.

Her father's death, too, had created a great blank—an aching sense of bereavement—that time did little to diminish. Whatever his faults might have been, Richard Stanwick, as a fond and indulgent parent, was deserving of the regret and loving, wistful memory cherished for him by his only child.

In order to know a little of what was transpiring in the fashionable world, from which she was now excluded, Violet sometimes purchased a society journal, reading it in the seclusion of her own room to avoid disapproving remarks from Miss Massinger.

Her heart beat fast on one day coming across a paragraph relating to Sir Charles Annesley, her old lover. He was about to consummate a marriage with the only daughter and heiress of a rich city man.

The paper fell from Violet's hands when she had read this paragraph through several times, and a bitter smile curved her lovely mouth.

So the wealth for which the baronet had been so long angling was on the point of becoming his! Doubtless he had not thought proper to acquaint his fiancée of that previous engagement, long since cancelled. Did the city man's daughter imagine that her patrician

lover was honestly fond of her apart from the million she possessed?

Perhaps, after all, Violet reflected, sadly, it was better to be poor and friendless, dependent upon her own exertions, than to be the wife of a man who had married her only for the sake of her wealth. Her poverty had at least saved her from such a life-long misery, such a bitter awakening from a midsummer night's dream of love and happiness that had existed only in her own imagination.

She no longer cared for Sir Charles. His conduct had shattered her love for him at one blow. Yet, connected as he was with that far-off beautiful past upon which her thoughts often rested so regretfully, she could not wholly disentangle him from it and the roseate light that hovered around it.

Her position as Miss Massinger's companion was fast becoming unbearable. Cecil Harrington redoubled his persecutions, and Violet became fearful, lest Miss Massinger should give her credit for encouraging him when once the love-making came under her notice.

A dogged, obstinate, pertinacity distinguished Cecil Harrington's passion for his aunt's beautiful companion. Violet's unvarying coldness, her speeches, frank to the verge of ineivility, failed to check or diminish it. Once discovered, Violet knew it would cost her her situation.

The constant strain upon her nerves—the effort to keep her hated suitor at bay—was beginning to make her look worn and harassed.

One day, while Miss Massinger was down stairs superintending the making of jam, Cecil Harrington urged upon Violet the expediency of a secret marriage.

"She can't go on living for ever, you know," he explained, in touching allusion to his absent relative, "and we must conciliate her till then to suit our own purpose, Violet. It won't be such a difficult matter to treat each other coolly, and behave as if we cared nothing for each other when once we are man and wife, will it? I shall have made sure of you then without offending Aunt Margaret. Violet, you must consent. I shall be miserable for life if you don't."

"You are guilty of unmanly conduct in thus annoying a defenceless woman, and pestering her with your unwelcome proposals," flashed Violet, turning at last upon her tormentor. "If you persist in doing so I shall be compelled to leave Rose Villa, and earn my living elsewhere. I cannot, and will not, marry you. No brave, honourable man would be guilty of proposing a secret marriage to the woman he loved. In your case my answer would be the same either way, so it makes little difference. Why expose yourself to the humiliation of repeated refusals from one who cares less than nothing for you?"

"But, Violet, hear me," pleaded Cecil, his sleepy, grey eyes wide awake for once, and expressive of something akin to pathos. "I'm awfully hard hit, and—"

Violet vanished through one of the two doors leading into the drawing-room without perceiving that Miss Massinger was using her ears freely at the other.

Half-an-hour later, after dismissing her nephew, Miss Massinger sent for Violet. One glance at the white, rigid face of her employer assured the girl that she knew all.

"Miss Stanwick, I am sorry to say that our connection must come to an end at once," she began, without any unnecessary preamble. "I overheard my nephew in the act of making you an offer of marriage this morning. His liking for you has not escaped my notice. It only needed this to confirm my suspicions. I must request you to leave my house to-day."

"Certainly, since you wish it," said Violet, with quiet hauteur, "although it is a cruel and unjust proceeding. Since you overheard Mr. Harrington's proposal, you are also aware of my refusal of it?"

"You did refuse him, I admit," said Miss Massinger, reluctantly. "Some credit is due



to you for remembering the discrepancy in your respective positions, and refusing to marry my nephew on that account. At the same time—"

"You ascribe a wrong motive to me in this matter," interrupted Violet, firmly. "No thought of your nephew's social superiority prevented me from accepting him. Indeed, I have never recognised such a distinction between us as the one you allude to. The position I formerly occupied in society was a far higher one than Mr. Harrington can ever hope to aspire to. Had I liked him I might have accepted his offer of marriage. I refused him simply because his suit was obnoxious to me in the extreme, and I had not the least wish to become his wife."

"This is plain-speaking, Miss Stanwick," said the spinster, divided between thankfulness at her dear boy's narrow escape, and indignation that any woman could fail to find him irresistible.

"I intend it to be. I wish to correct your erroneous idea, Miss Massinger. I cannot understand why you should send me from your house with less notice than a maid-of-all-work might expect, after such a declaration."

"Cecil is very obstinate," explained Miss Massinger. "If he has set his heart on marrying you he won't take no for an answer. He will persevere till he has succeeded in winning your consent. To remove this danger you must go. I will pay you a quarter's salary in lieu of notice, and you will be so kind as not to leave your new address with me. Then I can say truthfully that I am not aware of your destination. Oh, yes, you can apply to me for any references you may need in obtaining another situation. I am sorry to lose you, but there is no alternative. I mean to save Cecil—little as he cares for me—from an undesirable marriage. I could not do that if you remained."

"Your fears are groundless. I dislike your nephew too much ever to marry him!" said Violet, disdainfully, as she left the room, and went upstairs to commence her packing.

Her head ached fearfully; a sense of coming illness weighed her down. She knew not where to go, for the Shiftens were all in Germany, and their house was closed for the time being. Lonely, suffering, ill-treated, Violet hid her anguished face in her hands, and prayed vainly for death to come and release her.

## CHAPTER V.

WITH an effort Violet subdued her outburst of passionate despair, and set about the task of packing.

Since her aunt was absent from town she must find a suitable lodging until she succeeded in meeting with another situation.

She had her twenty pounds still intact, and a quarter's salary to receive in addition. But for that oppressive feeling of illness which rendered all exertion painful to her Violet would have experienced less regret at the idea of leaving her uncongenial employment.

In the corner of one of her trunks was a little bundle of papers, tied up with blue ribbon. Mr. Perry had brought these papers to her after Richard Stanwick's death, with a compassionate smile upon his grave face.

"Against my wishes your father bought up ten thousand pounds worth of shares in the Great Jamsetjee Railroad Company some time ago, Miss Stanwick," he explained. "As I anticipated, the scheme has proved a total failure. The natives pull up the rails as fast as they are laid down, and murder the navvies engaged in constructing the railroad. Owing to their belligerent attitude and other unfavourable combinations, the idea of making a railroad into the interior has practically been abandoned. The shares, I am sorry to say, are worth nothing. I cannot dispose of them, since it is so unlikely that Jamsetjees will ever go up again in value. Do you care to keep them by you on the chance of their

doing so? Oh, no, the creditors don't want them—they are really so much waste-paper. A pity, a sad pity, that money should have been spent to so little advantage."

"I may as well keep them," Violet had replied, sadly, taking the unlucky shares from the lawyer. "Who knows? They may bring me in a little money some day. At any rate, I will keep them for poor papa's sake. I do not blame him, Mr. Perry; I am only sorry for him that he should have been so unfortunate in all his investments."

So the Jamsetjees were stowed away in Violet's trunk, mute reminders whenever she looked at them of the mania for speculation that had been her father's ruin.

Her packing finished, she went out in search of a lodging.

There were plenty of cards in the different windows. Yet when Violet made inquiries as to the rent and number of the apartments to be let, they seldom corresponded with her requirements.

One landlady would not let less than three bedrooms with the small tawdry sitting-room. Another asked a price that Violet knew she could not pay, while a third objected to letting her rooms to a "single young lady," accompanying the remark with a sneer that made the girl's face flush hotly, she hardly knew why.

Through one small, "genteel" street after another she paced wearily, making frequent and useless inquiries wherever she saw a "To let" card in the window. Had ever a sitting-room and bedroom been so difficult to obtain before?

And the pain in her head was fast growing worse. What could it mean? Violet wondered, in a dull, stupefied way. Was she about to be ill? If so, Heaven help her!—alone among strangers. Perhaps the illness would bring death in its train! In that case it would not be altogether unwelcome.

A pleasant little house with green shutters, standing back in a garden, presently attracted her attention. There was a "To let" card in the first-floor window. Violet went up the garden-path, and knocked timidly. Her previous failures had discouraged her.

The door was opened by a gentle-faced, elderly woman dressed in Quaker-grey. In answer to Violet's inquiry she stated that she had two rooms to let, for which she asked only a moderate rental.

On inspection they proved to be clean and comfortable. The sitting-room especially was furnished with some regard for taste and elegance. No fearful-coloured prints or china monstrosities adorned either the walls or the mantelpiece. Pictures, carpet, ornaments, all bespoke refined choice, and careful selection. A cottage piano stood in one corner of the little apartment, and a well-filled bookcase ran along one wall, surmounted by some pieces of old blue Oriental ware.

Violet gladly decided to take the rooms, explaining her position as a companion out of employment to Mrs. Murray, the landlady, and offering a money deposit, and a reference to Miss Massinger, should either or both be necessary.

Mrs. Murray, however, was hardly as cautious as the generality of landladies. Violet's face and manner had taken her fancy. She felt quite sure that her new lodger was a lady, and she expressed herself willing to accept Violet upon her own recognisances.

Thankful to have secured a temporary resting-place Violet returned to Rose Villa to receive her salary, and remove her personal belongings.

Miss Massinger, grim as ever, handed over the quarter's money in silence, together with a superfluous bank-note for ten pounds. Even her tough conscience pricked her a little on beholding the white, weary face of the girl who was thus sending adrift at a moment's notice. She intended the bank-note as some amends for her harsh conduct.

But Violet, after signing a receipt for the quarter's salary, handed the bank-note back

to Miss Massinger with a look of inexpressible scorn.

"I will take what is due to me, and nothing more," she said, quietly. "Money cannot atone for conduct like yours, Miss Massinger—conduct devoid of all justice and womanly pity. On that account I refuse to accept it."

"As you please," retorted the other. "Your reflections upon my action in this matter trouble me very little, since I have the approval of my conscience. I am doing a good work in saving my nephew from an unsuitable marriage. To accomplish this I am compelled to send you away. If you fail to perceive the necessity that is not my fault. Take or leave the money, as you will; but remember, Miss Stanwick, that pride must have a fall, and you are full of pride."

"Only towards those who treat me with cruel injustice," said Violet, firmly; and even Miss Massinger quailed before the indignant glance of those dark blue eyes. "Perhaps, in the days to come, your behaviour towards a friendless woman may rise up in judgment against you, and nullify some of the self-righteous deeds with which you love to keep a debtor-and-creditor account with the Heaven which is so often upon your lips, and so seldom in your heart!"

Ere the astonished lady could utter any reply to this bold speech Violet had left the room.

A fly was waiting at the door; the luggage was soon piled on the top of it, and Violet Stanwick breathed more freely on being driven away from the inhospitable precincts of Rose Villa.

It was getting dusk when she arrived at her new lodgings. Mrs. Murray had lighted a fire in the sitting-room, and her little maid, a queer sharp-featured girl with sandy hair and a freckled face, came in presently with the tea-tray.

It was all very bright and cosy, but Violet felt too ill and unhappy to enjoy it. She drank some tea; her throat, parched and dry, would not admit of her taking any food, and then, getting out her desk, she tried to write a letter to her aunt.

Certain now that she was on the verge of an illness, perhaps a long and dangerous one, she was feverishly anxious to acquaint the only relative upon whom she had a claim with her painful position, and the circumstances that had led up to it, while the power of doing so was still hers.

But her trembling fingers refused to hold the pen. Unintelligible sentences appeared upon the paper, faintly traced, as if by a palsied hand.

Violet sat there staring blankly at her own changed handwriting, striving vainly to collect her thoughts.

A nervous dread of being alone took possession of her. Wild fancies flitted through her brain, weird faces seemed to gaze at her from the shadowy corners of the room—mocking, elfin laughter rang in her startled ears. Her father, Sir Charles, Miss Massinger, and Cecil Harrington—a ghostly quartet—joined hands and formed a ring round her, then vanished in grey smoke-wreaths up the chimney as noiselessly as they came. How quiet the room was! Oh! for life, sound, motion of some kind, to save her from going mad!

When Meg, the little maid, came to remove the teatray, something in Violet's appearance must have struck her as being unusual. From what she said, Mrs. Murray was induced to form a pretext for entering her lodger's sitting-room.

She found Violet still sitting in front of her desk, with heavy downcast eyes, regarding the unfinished letter.

"Miss Stanwick, I fear you are ill?" she said, gently, placing her hand on the girl's shoulder.

Violet looked up helplessly.

"Yes, I am very ill," she replied, a moan of pain in her voice. "I cannot imagine what is the matter with me. I have neve

felt like this before. I see such strange things as I sit here, and my head is on fire! Oh! what shall I do?"

"Have you any friends in London?" asked Mrs. Murray.

"My aunt lives there, but she is in Germany at the present time, and her house is closed. I was trying to write to her when you came in, only the words swam before my eyes and made me giddy. I must try to finish the letter to-night. I may be worse to-morrow!"

"Suppose you lie down for a little while, and let me finish the letter for you?" suggested Mrs. Murray, kindly. "You are not capable of writing to-night."

"If I am very ill you had better send me to the hospital," said Violet, feebly. "They will not refuse to take me in there, and I shall be out of everyone's way."

"My dear child, don't speak so bitterly," remonstrated the elder woman. "You may not be so ill as you imagine, and you are too young to give way to despair. Sit down now on the sofa, and I will bathe your forehead with eau de Cologne."

Under this soothing process Violet fell into an uneasy, convulsive sleep. When she awoke, with a sensation of twenty sledge-hammers all going at once in her head, a man's voice, deep, grave, and musical, pierced through the haze that enveloped all her faculties.

"She is very ill. I believe she is in for a sharp attack of brain fever. Send Meg for the doctor, Aunt Mary. If the room is ready I will carry her upstairs."

Violet felt herself gently lifted in a pair of strong arms. A delicious sense of rest and protection overwhelmed her, followed by the dull blank of perfect unconsciousness.

(To be concluded in our next.)

## NANCY'S SETTLEMENT.

—:—

### CHAPTER IV.

We had a prosperous crossing to Calais, and reached Paris in the early morning. A well-appointed carriage with English servants was waiting for us. One of the men stayed to look after the luggage, and we drove off at once, my destination being the very next house to Miss Greville's.

I think I must have looked a very white, weary little object, but my aunt welcomed me rapturously, kissed me again and again, insisted on my swallowing wine and soup, and then sent me to bed in the prettiest of little rooms, that looked to my English eyes all mirrors and lace curtains; for she told me I should be fit for nothing in the evening if I did not have my sleep then; and though I protested energetically that I was not in the least tired it is a fact that my eyes closed the moment my head touched the pillows.

It was five or six in the afternoon when I awoke; my things were unpacked, and Annette, my aunt's French maid, was waiting to dress me for dinner.

She spoke very little English, and all the French I had ever learnt seemed to forsake me; but we managed by signs and gesticulations.

She coiled my fluffy hair into a soft roll without appearing horrified by its colour, fastened my white muslin, and tied a broad blue sash round my waist. Then she left me, and after contemplating myself in the long cheval glasses I fell to wondering whether John would know me, so extremely altered did I seem.

Aunt Nora came in and took me to the salon. She, too, surveyed me critically.

"They told me you were seventeen, Nancy. Are you quite sure they didn't mean seven?"

"Quite, aunt. Why?"

"You look a mere baby, that's all. Mr. Carruthers must be fond of babies."

I blushed deeply.

"The moment I heard he had gone to Rhymington I hoped he would marry one of my nieces," said Aunt Nora, kindly; "but I never fancied he would choose the youngest. We had heard such wonderful accounts of Claudia."

"She is lovely."

"Only he didn't think so."

"Mother was very much afraid he would when he first came."

"Why afraid?"

"Claudia is so fond of pretty things; mother hopes she will marry some one very rich."

"Ah! I suppose they think Mr. Carruthers a very bad match for you, child?"

I blushed furiously.

"You don't think so yourself. You are not afraid of small means, eh, Nancy?"

"Not with him. I shouldn't mind if we lived in a little cottage, and kept no servant. I am very fond of sweeping and dusting."

"I think he will manage a maid-of-all-work," said my aunt, smiling. "At least I hope so, for he has promised me I am to be one of your earliest visitors, and I shouldn't like my hostess to be always in the kitchen."

"I am afraid you will have to wait a long time, aunt; mother thinks we can't be married for years and years."

"Mr. Carruthers wants November; but I have told him as we are almost in October now, and I can't spare you for another month. I think he had better wait till the New Year."

He came in then unannounced, with the easy bearing of an accustomed guest; my aunt disappeared as though by magic, so there was no one to witness our meeting.

"You have come then, child?"

"I couldn't stay away when I knew I should see you. Oh! John, I have missed you so."

"And I you."

"Isn't Aunt Nora nice?"

"Very. What did the others say when the invitation came?"

"They didn't like it."

"So I expected. I was half afraid they might prevail on Mrs. Beresford not to let you come."

"Theckla wanted to come instead; mother said you might object."

"Decidedly."

"She was very kind—mother, I mean—but she hoped I should not get my head turned by living in luxury."

"I hope not; you must remember you have promised to be a poor man's wife."

"I have been telling Aunt Nora we shall have a tiny cottage and no servant; but she seems to think we ought to have a maid-of-all-work."

John laughed.

"Did she tell you something else?"

"About what?"

"My wishes."

I hung my head.

"I see she has. Little one," he said, fondly, "I wanted you to be my wife in November, so that we might spend Christmas together in our own home; but I think your aunt is right. She wants to take you to England in a few weeks' time, and keep you with her till the New Year; so I suppose we must wait till January—it seems a long time."

"Long!" I exclaimed; "it is ridiculously short. Why, we shall only have been engaged three months, and I thought we must wait for years and years."

"I never said so, Nancy."

Dinner was a dainty little meal. When it was over, Aunt Nora played sweet dreamy German waltzes, and we two talked or listened as we felt inclined; John looked very handsome, and I was intensely happy.

"Is Sir Alaric in Paris?"

"Yes."

"Do you know when he is going home? I want to tell mother and the girls."

"December, I think; he said so the other day."

"But he changes his mind so often."

"Does he; I don't think so. Ask Lady Anne—she is a great friend of his."

"Oh! John, I do dread seeing her so."

"I am very sorry, Nancy; for I have promised to take you there to-morrow."

How I dreaded the ordeal. My aunt did not accompany us; she saw that I wore my grey cashmere, and told me, approvingly, Lady Anne was fond of quiet colours; she called me a goose for looking so frightened, and then John came and took me to pay my dreaded visit.

Realities are never like what we have imagined they would be. I had fancied Lady Anne some grim old dowager; I saw a woman of my mother's age, looking much younger, and dressed in the simplest black cashmere; she had a very sweet gentle face, and kissed me affectionately.

"You may come back to dinner, Jack, but you must go now," she told my lover. "I want this child to myself for a long talk."

I think she saw how I trembled, for when he was gone she took off my hat and unfastened my jacket with no unkindly touch, and, placing me on the sofa beside her, asked gently why I was so frightened.

I told her the whole story; how the red hair that had made her regret me as a *protégée*, had been my bugbear through life, how none of my family had ever been able to forgive me their disappointed hopes, and how her own name had been associated in my mind with my own shortcomings.

Lady Anne looked really grieved.

"My dear, I am very sorry; believe me, I never guessed this, never dreamed it. How you must have hated me, little Nancy."

"No; but it made me sorry."

"I never had a child of my own, Nancy, save one little baby; she was born almost at the same time as your sister Patty, and she died through the carelessness of her nurse, a red-faced woman with a squint, a freckled skin, and hair of the most intense sandy shade; that hair was as different from yours as light from darkness. I distinctly told Susan I never could take any interest in a child who resembled the woman who had so wronged me, but, Nancy, I love auburn hair; my own darling's was that tint."

"Mother thought—"

"I think I was very much to blame for acting as I did, but Susan and I were such friends I thought she could not misunderstand me. After your birth her letters were rapturous; she wrote you were the fairest of all her children. I used to send you pretty nick-nacks from abroad. I looked forward to the time when I might see you. I felt I had a new interest in life, when one day came a short, abrupt letter from your father. I can repeat it by heart even now,—

"DEAR LADY ANNE,—We are forced to decline your further benefactions to my youngest child.—Yours truly,

"CHARLES BERESFORD."

"You never answered it?"

"I thought I had in some way hurt their feelings, and I waited to hear from your mother how I had offended her. Nancy, I never knew the true meaning of that abrupt note of Dr. Beresford's until the Countess went to Rhymington, and wrote me the story of Nancy's failure."

"And mother thought you were so angry and annoyed you would take no notice of her."

"Poverty makes people very sensitive. When I made that absurd stipulation, Nancy, 'unless she has red hair,' I thought I was suggesting an impossible contingency. To me 'red hair' meant a coarse, fiery crop of what boys call 'carrots.' That the child of your father and mother could have what is almost peculiar to the lower orders never dawned on me. So all these years we have been at cross-purposes, and I fear my poor little god-daughter has borne the burden of our mistakes."

"I don't mind now."



"Now you have John. He is a good man, little Nancy; he will make you happy."

"I am sure of it."

"I have known him a great many years. His little sister was almost like my child."

"I remember he told me she was called Nancy."

"Yes, I wanted another godchild after I lost you; but this Nancy was taken from me by a higher power; she died in childhood."

"She was John's only sister."

"The only one. He has no relation in the world except a distant cousin."

"Is she nice?"

"She is very fond of him."

"Is it really true, Lady Anne, that you are going home to Beaumont Hall?"

"I am going there with my nephew Alaric in December, or even sooner. You must come and stay with us, Nancy, if your mother can spare you. I have done very little for my godchild hitherto, but I mean to choose you a trousseau, and to give you what you once told John you most desired."

I had quite forgotten what it was.

She smiled.

"The cheque for your board and lodgings which you wanted to pay to your parents. It is clear if anyone pays it I am the rightful person, but I think I shall rate your maintenance at a different figure than you did."

"Fifty pounds a-year! It sounds a great deal, but I have a shockingly large appetite. Lady Anne, I am very sorry."

"You ought to be glad."

"But think what an expense I shall be to John!"

"You won't ruin him; besides, I shall settle something on you for pin money. Nonsense, child, of course I shall; it was one of the conditions specially agreed upon in that compact I made so long ago with your mother."

I settled down among my new surroundings as though I had been born to them. I wrote home—to mother—saying that I was very happy, and if she didn't mind John wanted us to be married in January. Aunt Nora and Lady Anne both thought he could afford it, but he was coming to Ryhmington in December and he would explain all about his means to father. Then I told her how Lady Anne was going to give me my trousseau and something for pin-money besides, and that she hoped very soon to see her dear old friend again, for she was coming in December to stay with Sir Alaric at Beaumont Hall.

It was the first letter I had ever written to mother in my life, and it filled the whole sheets, and even then I had to cross them to tell of Aunt Nora's kindness, and how fond she seemed of John.

I had risen in importance in my family, for my letter was answered promptly by a whole budget of notes, most of them kind and affectionate, though Claudia's did reproach me for engrossing the only two powerful friends we possessed—Lady Anne and Aunt Nora; one of them, suggested my pretty sister, would have been quite enough for me to appropriate as my own property—the other should have been left free to devote herself to my sisters.

But a few sharp words can't hurt when one is happy, and I was happy in those bright autumn days. There seemed no single cloud upon my sunshine, and I could afford to smile as I read Claudia's reproach.

It did strike me sometimes John was a little idle in lingering so long with me instead of taking up the duties of his new position; but he explained to me it was thought he had better not enter on it until we were married, and so he could afford a holiday.

He used to take me about a great deal, and I am afraid Paris made him very extravagant, for he had quite discarded the shabby suits he used to wear at Ryhmington, and was always dressed in most irreproachable garments.

He and I used to indulge a great deal in the amusement beloved of Traddles and his Sophy. He was never tired of gazing into shop-windows and pointing out what he would

give to each other if he "could afford it," and I think, like the two people before quoted, we got almost as much enjoyment out of this as though he had been rich enough to carry out our wishes.

Lady Anne was very merciful to me in the matter of dressmakers. My pattern was taken once and for all, then the garments were cut from it by some new and rather complicated scientific method, so that not one of them needed to be fitted on.

Aunt Nora's present to me was her jewel case and its contents. She was too old, she said, to wear ornaments any more; and though I assured her again and again I should always be a great deal too poor to display such splendours, and their very possession might entice burglars to the little cottage I hoped to own, she was persistent in her munificent gift.

And at last the day came for my return to England, only I was not going to Prospect House. It was Lady Anne's wish to take me to Beaumont Hall as her guest; and mother, who saw in the plan great advantages for Claudia's views concerning Sir Alaric, at once submitted.

Father met us at the station—he was to dine at the Hall. Mother and Patty had been invited, but declined. A seven-mile drive on a December night was hardly possible to ladies when an open gig was the only vehicle at their disposal. I don't think I missed them. I know it was enough for me when I felt the dear old pater's arm round me, and heard him pronounce my welcome home.

"She looks well, doesn't she, Charles?" said Aunt Nora, a little huskily. "We have all taken care of your youngest girl."

"Too much care, I fear," said father, laughing. "I hope you haven't turned her head. Where's Carruthers?"

But John was already at the Hall. He had come down by a previous train—I think in Sir Alaric's company.

There was something very mysterious to me about the baronet. His name was familiar to me as a household word, and yet I had never once beheld him in the flesh.

Something of this I mentioned as we drove to the Hall—a very cosy party—in the handsome landau. Lady Anne smiled.

"You shall see him to-night, Nancy; and I think you will like him very much."

The baronet did not come out to receive us. My lover stood alone on the terrace steps. He welcomed my father warmly, and led the way into a cosy sitting-room, where tea stood awaiting us.

"What are you looking for, Nancy?" my lover asked me when my eyes had wandered once or twice rather anxiously to the door.

"Sir Alaric. It seems so strange he should not come to see us when this is his own house."

"Aunt," said John, in a low tone to Lady Anne, "I think we are ready."

She smiled and turned to me.

"Nancy, I always promised myself the pleasure of introducing you to my kinsman. Let me present you to Sir Alaric John Carruthers Beaumont, of Beaumont Hall."

At first I looked round as though expecting a stranger; then the truth dawned on me.

"Does she mean you?" I asked my fiancé.

"Yes."

"Then I think you have deceived us horribly. You said you were a doctor's assistant."

"I studied for a doctor. I think, Nancy, I have a legal right to set up a plate with M.D. after my name, and begin to practise on my own account."

"And you pretended to be poor."

"I told you I was horribly poor for my position; and so I am—few baronets more so."

"And you said you had new and arduous duties?"

"Those of upholding the honour of our family name in my own county and dealing justly with my estate and its tenants."

"Nancy," said my father, comically, "I wonder you never guessed it."

"Did you?" I retorted.

"Never; but I have not seen quite so much of the conspirator. There is only one thing that puzzles me now."

"Let me explain it?" asked Sir Alaric.

"Why did you ever come to Ryhmington?"

"To please my aunt; she always had a kind of hankering after Mrs. Beresford, but she could never summon up the courage to break the ice, and renew the correspondence."

"You came to please your aunt," I said, rather gravely.

"But I stayed to please myself. Nancy, you won't take back your promise?"

"I couldn't."

"But this is a serious business, Nancy," said my father. "Do you know you will be a real my lady?"

"I'm very sorry."

Alaric smiled.

"You'll put up with it, dear, for my sake?"

"And Claudia?"

Papa laughed, but I shuddered. I really felt frightened as I thought of her disappointment.

"I was never good enough for Claudia," said John—I mean Sir Alaric. "Mrs. Beresford let me see that clearly from the first."

"She will be very angry with me."

"Let her."

My father took the brunt of the explanation on himself. When my lover drove me over to Prospect House the following afternoon, mother and the girls all knew that I was to be Lady Beaumont, and the plain John Carruthers they had slighted was Sir Alaric—a powerful baronet of old estate and name.

"You must come and stay with us in London," he told Claudia, kindly. "With your beauty you ought to be a peeress, and you know there are one or two unmarried earls left even yet."

I think Claudia fancied he was laughing at her, but I knew he meant it.

"And you will want a grand wedding," said mother, nervously; "not just the plain, quiet affair we had thought of?"

"As plain as you like, so that I get my wife," answered Sir Alaric. "I think I have been kept waiting for her long enough."

"We can't spare her," said Theckla.

John looked sterner than I had ever seen him.

"I did not know you attached such a high value to your sister," he said, sarcastically.

Well, we were married in January; the three girls were my bridesmaids. It was not a very grand affair, but a report of it got into most of the country papers; and when John read me one of the descriptions of the event, a week later, I was surprised to hear myself described in one of them as the "beautiful and accomplished bride;" but then as the next paragraph alluded to my blue eyes and golden hair, I decided that newspaper reporters were either colour-blind or sadly lacking in veracity.

We came home to England in time for me to be presented at Court the first Drawing Room after Easter, and for two or three months I enjoyed all that was best worth seeing in the London season; then we turned our faces towards quiet and retirement, and settled down at Beaumont Hall, where Lady Anne and Aunt Nora fulfilled their promise of visiting us.

It was in the November after my marriage that they were both there together, and both stood sponsors to my first-born child, whom her father insisted on naming June, after the month of roses in which he first met me.

There is frequent intercourse between Prospect House and Beaumont Hall.

My children (already little June has two successors) are greater favourites with their aunts than their mother expected, and my dear old pater is never so pleased as when he pays long visits to my nursery, for there are no other grandchildren to divide his love with my little ones.

My brothers still lack the means to marry just yet, though two of them are in that debatable state known as engaged; and as for the girls, Patty is a very happy, though childless, wife to a missionary, whose far-off home is beyond the Ganges.

Thekla is studying at Geneva. What particular line she intends to assualt the world by her success in we don't exactly know, but we fancy she means to be a celebrated chymist. It is my Alaric who finds the funds for her career, and I honestly think when he offered to send her to the University she forgave him for having made her despised sister into Lady Beaumont.

Claudia's fate is not so satisfactory. She was with us one season in London, and much admired.

Two or three men proposed to her; but one was too poor, another too old. She flirted so much as to disgust the third, and endow Sir Alaric with a wholesome dread of inviting her again.

She is twenty-five now, and would, I think, be very glad to welcome back either of those once-despised suitors, for she does not want to remain Claudia Beresford all her days; and, rather than such a contingency, would be content to make even such a bad match as was once, in her opinion, NARRY'S SETTLEMENT.

[THE END.]

## FACETIE.

WHAT is the greatest curiosity in the world? A woman's.

A STANDING rule in busses—Hold on to the straps.

At a public-house the landlord has painted up outside his door, "Good beer sold here; but don't take my word for it."

WOMEN are the hardest conundrums ever given to man, and yet man never seems to be willing to give them up.

A COUNTRY paper says a lagoon has gone up so high as to produce a slight increase in the price of sand.

"I OWE you mankind," said an arrogant fellow to a clergyman. "I see you have studied your own nature deeply," was the quiet reply.

"He tried to kiss me, and I just told him to behave," said an irate young lady, after a ride down the road the other day. "Well, did he kiss you?" asked her friend. "No, the idiot! He behaved."

"A MERCHANT'S lie," said Lawyer Geppem, glancing carelessly at the legal papers he held in his hand. "Yes," responded the facetious judge, "a merchant's usually lean, while his lawyer is fat."

A COOK paper publishes the following erratum: "The words printed 'pigs and cows,' in Mr. Parker's letter on the land question, which appeared in yesterday's issue, should have been *pros and cons*."

A POPULAR poet was much attached to a young lady who was born a day before him, and who did not return his passion. "Yours is a hard case," said a friend. "It is, indeed," said the poet, "for I came into the world a day after the fair."

"Who is your family physician, George?" "Doctor Smoothman." "What! Why do you employ that half-brained creature?" "Oh, my wife once asked him if he could tell her why she always had cold feet, and he told her they were so small they couldn't hold blood enough to keep them warm. Since that she won't have any other doctor."

WHEN INQUIRY is MADE, &c.—A FACT.—Party (who has brought back the "music" stool in disgust): "Look 'ere, Mister Auctioneer, this plaguy thing wint no manner of use at all. I've twisted it round, and my old woman 'av' twisted it round, butorra a bit of toon we can get out of it."

"Robby," whispered young Featherly, "did your sister Sadie get a note from me last night? It was written on pink paper." "Oh, yes! she must have got it," said Robby, "cause when she came down to breakfast this morning her hair was done up in pink curl-papers."

Little Edith: "Mr. Sapley, why does my sister pray when you come to see her?" "Surely she doesn't. What do you mean?" "Why, every time you come here and the servant comes up to the library to say you are in the parlour, Clara just shrugs her shoulders and says: 'Oh, Lord!'"

"You look tired, Miss Golightly." "Do I? Getting old, I suppose. You know the saying, 'A man's as old as he feels, and a woman's as old as she looks.'" "Well, I'm sure the saying does not hold good in your case." (And then he smiled his killing smile, as who should say "I have fetched her!" but she withered him him with a glance, and the conversation suddenly flagged.)

A FRENCHMAN said: "I never see so much contradiction as these English have in their drink. They put in some whiskey to make it strong, some water to make it weak, some lemon to make it sour, some sugar to make it sweet; and then they take up the glass, say 'Here's to you,' and then, by God, they drink it themselves."

"Excuse me, didn't I tell you an hour ago to send that young man of yours home?" "Yes, papa, dear." "But he went out only just now. I heard him." "Yes, papa, dear; but he went the first time, and then he found he'd taken your umbrella by mistake, and so he came to bring it back. Dear George is so conscientious!"

"I THINK, pa, that our cross neighbour is a well-meaning man, after all," said a little girl to her father. "Why so, my dear?" "Because his wife says he means to dig a well, and so, of course, he is well meaning." It is reported that the old man lighted his pipe like an Arab, and as silently fled away.

"I NAMED my gun, and I brought it down," Algernon was saying, with that careless ease of manner that so well became him, when suddenly his entranced auditors became conscious of the approach of old Mrs. Ferguson, who keeps the little fish and poultry shop in the High-street. "I beg your pardon, sir," she said, "but when you bought them birds, did you count the change I gave you?"

CONFESSIONS: "Remember that all the French goods are in this case." New Clerk: "How do you get them fresh?" "Fresh? Why, we make them, of course." "But I thought they were imported." Oh, no; we make 'em ourselves." "But then, why is it called French? Do the ingredients come from France?" "Well, I don't know; maybe the plaster of Paris does."

"PLEASE give me something to eat. I've not had a warm mouthful for a week." "Here, my good man, is a plate of nice hot soup for you," replied the cook. "Hot soup!" he growled: "haven't you anything else? This makes the fifth plate of hot soup I've had in the last hour. It is not healthy to put so much soup on an empty stomach."

"THERE'S something that I want you to read," said Fogg, laying down a letter. "It's from my wife. But don't criticise the orthography, please. Fact is, Mrs. Fogg was a school teacher for a good many years, and, therefore, she never learned to spell. It wasn't necessary, you know. She always had the spelling-book when she was hearing her class. But it comes rather awkward now for her when she comes to write a letter."

"You say your husband has a good memory, do you Mrs. Crimmonbank?" "Oh, excellent," responded the lady addressed. "And how do you know it is so very good?" "Well, I asked him to bring me home a mackerel over a week ago, and he brought it home to-day. Now, a man must have a pretty good memory to remember a little thing like that."

OLD Colonel Barkins was known as the laziest man in Mudge Hollow; "and yet," said a Mudge Hollow punster, "he is always labouring away from morning to night!" "Labouring away!" exclaimed a neighbour; "how is that?" "Labouring under a mistake," was the ruthless reply.

BLOUSHING IN THE WRONG PLACE.—A well-known beauty has one drawback; her hands are the colour of boiled lobster. Someone happened to mention her name to Dr. Holmes. "She is very pretty," said the wit; "I see only one fault in her. Her hands are a trifle too—bashful!"

IMPORTANT young merchant, engaging new boy: "Now, my boy, remember, if I engage you, I shall give you every opportunity of promotion; but you must submit pleasantly to strict discipline—I am something of a martinet." Boy: "Oh, I thought you were a sugar broker!"

"WELL, Allie, dear, is that the way to begin your dinner?" asked a mother of her little daughter, as she began with the pie instead of the bread and butter. "Well, I declare, mamma, I was going to eat my dinner upside down, wasn't I?"

"I'VE gone about as high in masonry as anybody can," said a labourer. "Is that so? How high have you gone?" "Well, I worked on the top of the Nelson monument as a mason." "But that's not taking any degrees in masonry." "It isn't, eh? Well, you'd a thought it was, if you'd been there, with the thermometer thirty-three degrees below zero. I took all the degrees I care to just now."

PEOPLE are accustomed to say that any discovery whereby their own inventions or designs have been annulled has "taken the wind out of their sails." This saying is appropriate enough for people who still cling to sailing vessels, but with an eye to the general state of navigation in these days, probably it would be better to complain that we have had the steam taken out of our cylinders.

"I UNDERSTAND that your rival, Jenkins, has written a letter to the papers in which he calls you an embezzler and a thief." "Yes, he has, and I'm going to sue him for libel and lay my damages at half a million pounds." "But I am told that he says he can prove the truth of his charges." "So he can, and that's the beauty of it, my boy. He can prove the truth of his charges, and 'the greater the truth the greater the libel,' you know. Oh, I've got the dead wood on him this time, sure."

FACE SLEPPED.—Charlie, a bright four-year-old, although a good boy as boys go, sometimes gives occasion for serious reproof from his mother. On a recent occasion of this sort Charlie began looking rather sour, when his mother took him to task for it, and told him that he ought to look pleasant. But his face continued to wrinkle till his mother remarked, "Why, Charlie, I am astonished to see you making faces at your mother, Charlie." Charlie brightened up at once, and retorted, "Why, I meant to laugh, but, mamma, my face slipped."

AN Indian physician was holding forth the other day to some of his brothers of the craft in England. "You sirs in the West," he said, "do not understand the practice of medicine. In my country, if a rajah with nothing of sickness sends for me, I go and I say, 'Sair, your case is a bad one; you will be worse before you are better.' I give him some medicine and I go away. The next day I go again, and I find him heaving like a sea-sick mandarin, and wishing that the son of his mother had never seen the light. 'Sair, I say, I told you so; you have passed a great crisis. There is no more need of medicine. Another sun will see your cure complete.' I then collect my fees and I go away. When I have cured a few more rajahs, I shall come again to your country and take a villa on your little river Thames."



## SOCIETY.

**THE QUEEN AND MISS MOUNT.**—The following letter has been received by Elizabeth Mount, who was left alone on board the *Columbine* when that vessel sailed crewless from the Scotch coast, and was recovered off Norway:—"Wind-sor Castle, March 27th, 1886.—The Queen has been touched by the account of the sufferings endured by Miss Mount, and was pleased to learn by her brother's letter of the 20th inst. that she is recovering her strength. Her Majesty has commanded Sir Henry Ponsonby to forward to Miss Mount a cheque for £20."

**THE DUKES OF CONNAUGHT** is expected to leave for India in the last week of June, the Dukes joining him there about the following October; their stay in India is not expected to exceed two years. The Dukes are not, we regret to learn, regaining health so quickly as could be desired; the Royal babe, however, increases in strength and bulk daily.

The private view of the Royal Academy Exhibition takes place on the Friday in Easter week. Neither Mr. Woolner nor Mr. Armistead will be represented at Burlington House this year.

It is probable that the Princess Irene of Hesse, third daughter of the Grand Duke, will be betrothed to the Grand Duke Michael Michailovitch, the second of the six sons of the Grand Duke Michael Nicolaievitch, one of the auncles of the present Czar. The Grand Duke, who was born in 1841, is five years older than Princess Irene, who is now staying at St. Petersburg on a visit to her sister, the Grand Duchess Serge.

Mrs. Burton, who has been sketching in Wadi Haifa and its neighbourhood, will return to England, accompanied by her husband, Colonel Buller, about the end of this month.

**THE QUEEN** intends to place a marble bust of the late Principal Tulloch in the hall at Balmoral Castle.

**THE QUEEN** will be amongst the exhibitors at the Folkestone National Art Treasures Exhibition, having promised to send a number of very valuable paintings, tapestry, and other articles of artistic interest.

**THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES** sent lovely floral wreaths to be placed over the remains of Mr. Villibois at his funeral. Attached to the wreath sent by the Princess was a card bearing this inscription:—"Rest in peace; a small token of affectionate remembrance to the dear old squire, from Alexandra." The Prince's wreath was inscribed:—"As a mark of sincere friendship and regard from the Prince of Wales to his oldest friend in the county of Norfolk."

Mr. LIONEL TILLYARD, who some weeks ago was seized with a dangerous illness, resulting from malaria while on a visit at Government House, India, is gradually recovering, but in consequence of the hot weather it has been deemed advisable to send him to Europe without delay.

**PRINCESS SOPHIE**, third daughter of the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany, is suffering from an attack of measles. Her sister, Princess Victoria, is now convalescent from the same complaint.

Mrs. OLIPHANT was lately presented to Her Majesty at Windsor, and offered to the Queen a copy of her last novel, which was graciously accepted. A few days later the eminent novelist received a handsomely bound copy of *More Leaves from a Highland Journal*, bearing on the fly-leaf a few appreciative words in the handwriting of the Royal authoress.

The memorial which has been largely signed by the friends and admirers of Mr. Ruskin for presentation to that gentleman bears as its first signature the name of Princess Beatrice.

## STATISTICS.

**THE FARMERS.**—The statistics of the Ancient Order of Foresters for last year, just completed by the permanent secretary, show that on January 1, 1886, the benefit members numbered 647,077, belonging to 4,930 courts, in 284 districts. The court funds amount to £3,314,366, and the district funds to £405,844, making together £3,720,210, an increase on the year of £136,035. There are besides 61,957 members, with £73,080 funds, belonging to the various juvenile societies.

The five largest libraries in the world, in their order, are:—The National Library of France, at Paris, 2,000,000 volumes; the library of the British Museum, London, 1,150,000 volumes; the Imperial Library of Russia, at St. Petersburg, 1,100,000 volumes; the Royal Public Library at Dresden, 900,000, and the Royal Library at Berlin, 700,000 volumes. In America, the five largest are:—The Boston Public Library (about), 553,000 volumes; Library of Congress, at Washington, 350,000 volumes; Yale College Library, 190,000 volumes; Astor Library, New York, 180,000 volumes; Mercantile Library, New York, 180,000 volumes.

## GEMS.

TEN measures of garrulity, says the Talmud, were sent down upon the earth; and the women took nine. I have known in my life eight terrific talkers, and five of them were of the masculine gender.

No article of furniture should be put into a room that will not stand sunlight, for every room in a dwelling should have the windows so arranged that some time during the day a flood of sunlight will force itself into the apartments.

EVERY human soul has a germ of some flowers within; and they would open if they could only find sunshine and free air to expand it. I always told you that not having enough sunshine was what ailed the world. Make the people happy and there will not be half the quarrelling or a tenth part of the wickedness there is.

KEENNESS in a man is not always to be taken as a sign of capacity, for it is generally observed most in those who are selfish and over-reaching; and his keenness generally ends in that kind of penetration into other people's interests which tend to benefit his own.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**RAISONS OF PIGEONS.**—First, clean and wash the pigeons; then put a very little water in a kettle, and put them in; let them simmer gently until tender; then remove, keeping them hot, and if there is not enough gravy in the kettle, add a little more water; put in two ounces of butter, a little salt, pepper, and sweet marjoram; let all these boil together; thicken with a little dusting of flour; then put back the pigeons, and let all boil for a few minutes, so as to season them; have some toast snippets cut into diamonds, put them round the edge of a dish, and put the birds and gravy in the centre.

**VEAL LOAF.**—Purinish a good relish for supper. Take two pounds of veal and chop it very fine, about as if for mince-meat; two coffee cups of fine bread crumbs, two eggs well beaten, a teaspoonful of salt with black pepper mixed with it, a little sifted sage, or any other leaf you choose, and a lump of butter to stiff your taste. Beat these all together in the chopping-bowl, and put in an earthen pudding-dish, well buttered; press it down very hard. Bake in a hot oven for an hour. Let it get perfectly cold before you attempt to cut it; then it will be possible to cut it in thin slices.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

It is the infirmity of little minds to be taken with every appearance and dazzled with everything that sparkles; but great minds have but little admiration, because few things appear new to them.

**AGATES.**—Southern Brazil, and especially the province of Rio Grande do Sul, with the neighbouring Uruguay, is the principal source of those stones which are sold under the name of opal, chalcedony, and agate. The trap rocks that penetrate the province in many directions, especially in the strip of high ground that branches off from Tagnary, not far from the provincial capital Porto Alegre, furnish considerable quantities of the finest agates and in the greatest variety. These semi-precious stones, which afterwards develop great beauty, look very unattractive at first embedded in their dark-coloured clay.

**TRULY HONOURABLE.**—The truly honourable man tries to remain ignorant of things that concern him not. He turns aside from the confidential gossip, glances away from the open desk, shuns the place where a whisper is audible, with just as much care as he would use to avoid profiting by a mistake in his change. His curiosity does not crave the knowledge of such matters. 'Twas the whole wide world for its ares, and seeks its satisfaction in more wholesome directions. After all, the information to which we have no right is the smallest and poorest and least valuable to us of any that we can obtain. Let us cultivate a worthy curiosity on subjects that shall enlarge our minds, deepen our feeling, and strengthen our purposes, and we shall shrink from that ignoble inquisitiveness that revels in dishonest gains.

**LIFE IN SCOTLAND.**—In Scotland the relations of father and children are very formal. Unless you have been in Scotland you can have no idea how serious life can be. A Scotch friend of our author's goes, it appears, every year to spend a month with his father, a minister of the Presbyterian church, and in other respects a person of consideration. On the day of departure he always finds on the breakfast-table his little account for the month, and being a wary Scotchman like his father, carefully checks the items, and the addition before paying it, when this sort of conversation takes place: "But father, I see that you have charged me with eggs and bacon for breakfast yesterday. I assure you that I never touched the eggs." "You are wrong, my boy," says papa. "They were on the table. There was nothing to prevent your using them!"

**RESTORATION OF LIFE.**—Dr. Richardson has started the question whether life may not be restored after actual death, and relates some facts that point to the answer as being in the affirmative. By combining artificial circulation with artificial respiration, a dog was restored to life an hour and five minutes after having been killed by an overdose of chloroform, when the heart had become perfectly still and cold, and was passing into rigidity. Animals that have been killed by suffocation, and partially dissected, were brought to such a state of muscular irritability that the experiment was stopped for fear that they would return to conscious, sentient life. Frogs poisoned by nitrate of amyl were restored after nine days of apparent death, in one case after signs of putrefactive change had commenced. The action of peroxide of hydrogen in reanimating the blood and restoring heat in a really dead body is quite startling. From these observations, Mr. W. Mottion Williams thinks the conclusion is justified that "a drowned or suffocated man is not hopelessly dead so long as the bodily organs remain uninjured by violence or disease, and the blood remains sufficiently liquid to be set in motion artificially, and supplied with a little oxygen to start the chemical movements of life."

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**EMIL.**—Weak eyes may be benefited by bathing them occasionally in a weak solution of salt and water.

**LAUREL.**—To avoid pimples, be particular in regard to your diet, avoiding very salt, greasy, or rich food.

**B. W.**—Considerably better than the majority of letters received by us.

**G. H. T.**—The individual members of the firm named are unknown to us; neither can we vouch for the reliability of it, or any other business corporation.

**J. C. G.—1.** A sty is nothing more nor less than a small painful boil at the edge of the eyelid. In severe cases apply a poultice, and open it as soon as it begins to point. After it has discharged freely, apply, on going to bed, for two or three nights, a little diluted nitrate of mercury ointment. Tonics and alteratives are frequently required to break up the formation of styes.

**T. R.—1.** The name of "Agnus" signifies chaste, pure. It may be acrostiched thus:—

"Above them all the damsel stands,  
Gladly her worshippers draw near,  
Not the regard which gold commands  
Enthuses her for her homage here—  
Sweetness and beauty make her dear."

2. Your weight is not above the average of one so tall.

**T. R. D.**—Constantine had the subject of Easter brought before the Council of Nice in 325. The question was fully discussed, and finally settled for the whole church by adopting the rule which makes Easter Day to be always the first Sunday after the full moon which happens upon or next after March 21; and if the full moon happens on a Sunday, Easter Day is the Sunday after. By this arrangement Easter may come as early as March 22, or as late as April 25.

**J. B. W.—1.** A large cup of hot water taken each morning before breakfast is especially recommended for constipation. It is also thought to be beneficial in cases of dyspepsia. 2. A tolerably strong solution of borax and water, with the addition of a little pure cologne, will generally cure fleas. Apply with a linen rag night and morning, and let the solution dry on the skin.

**D. N.—1.** In monarchies the killing of the king, or an attempt to take his life, is treason. In England, to imagine or compass the death of the king, or of the queen consort, or of the prince, or of the heir apparent of the crown, is high treason. In America treason is confined to the actual levying of war against the United States, or an adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. 2. It can be greatly improved by practice.

**AMY D.—1.** Pronounces *Mon dieu* (my God) *mon de-juh*; *Christus*, *chris-tus*—the final *a* having a broad sound; *Apache*, *ap-pa-shay*, accenting the second syllable. *Mademoiselle* is the French appellation applied to a young unmarried lady; when married she is addressed as *madame*. 2. It would be decidedly impolite for a gentleman to ask a lady's assistance in putting on his overcoat, even if on the most intimate terms with her. 3. Take leave of the gentleman caller in the parlour, and do not accompany him to the front door. 4. The case of betrothed lovers, this formality is of course dispensed with; and many a young lady can trace the origin of a "cold in the head" to the fact that she has lingered too long in conversation at the entrance to her house.

**LILLIE.**—We presume you refer to Funchal, a seaport town and capital of the island of Madeira, a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean, where the mean temperature is about 68 degrees F., and the differences between the hottest and coldest months (August and February) averages only ten degrees. It is resorted to by invalids from all countries. Its population is about 25,000. The streets are narrow, with steep ascents, and paved with small stones. Travelling and the transfer of merchandise are done on mules, drawn by oxen. Fresh meat and poultry are scarce and high, but fruit, fish, and vegetables are abundant and cheap. The houses are mostly of stone. The trade is chiefly in the hands of the English residents. The number of invalid visitors from England alone is estimated at three hundred annually. While the efficacy of the climate in cases of advanced pulmonary disease has, it is said, been greatly exaggerated, there is no doubt of the benefit to be derived by those whose lungs have not become badly damaged.

**AMY.**—To prepare skeleton leaves, soak the leaves in rain water until they are decomposed. For this purpose, when the leaves are collected, they should be placed in an earthenware pan or a wooden tub kept covered with rain water, and allowed to stand in the sun. In about two weeks they should be examined, and if found pulpy and decaying, will be found ready for skeletonizing, for which process some cards, a camel's hairbrush, as well as one rather stiff (a toothbrush, for instance), will be required. When all is prepared, gently lift a leaf on to a card, and with the stiff brush carefully remove the skin. Have ready a basin of clean water, and when the skin of one side is completely removed, reverse the card in the water, and slip it under the leaf, so that the other side will be uppermost. Brush this to remove the skin, when the fleshy part will most likely come with it; but if not it will readily wash out in the water. If particles of the green-coloured matter still adhere to the skeleton, endeavour to remove them with the stiff brush; but if that prove of no avail, use the hard one.

**B. N.**—Your grammar, punctuation and spelling are all equal to any we have ever received.

**YVONNE.**—It may be dilalike or self-consciousness that he has been in the wrong. The last pen suits your hand best. It is very good writing.

**HOPPER K. T.—1.** Liquid ammonia applied with a piece of cloth. 2. Upwards of twenty pounds means more than that sum. 3. Moderate writing. You want practice from good copies.

**D. H. S.**—The cost of the walks referred to would depend upon the value of the materials used; new materials costing of course more than the rubbish, lime or otherwise, found in disuse about the premises.

**GERTRUDE.**—Leipzig. A conservatory of music was founded there by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in 1843, and a professorship of music was established in the Leipzig University in 1860. Few places are more devoted to the cultivation of music and the drama than Leipzig.

**ROSA.—1.** To remove the yellow coating on your teeth, clean night and morning with a moderately stiff brush, soft water and castile soap. The use of tooth-powders is not to be recommended, as the gritty substances of which they are composed are very apt to injure the enamel of the teeth, and thus lead to rapid decay. 2. Very neat.

**GORDON.**—The author of "Home! Sweet Home!" John Howard Payne, was born at No. 33, Broad-street, New York, on June 9, 1791. When only thirteen years of age he contributed a dramatic criticism to a juvenile paper of which he was the editor, and it was republished in the columns of one of the New York daily journals. Some time afterwards he prepared himself for the stage, and made his debut at the Park Theatre as Young Norval, in the tragedy of *Douglas*. In 1813 he sailed for England, where he met with much favour.

## LOVE TRUE AND STRONG.

Swift pass the days with plighted hearts,  
When love is true and strong;  
For their each moment soon departs,  
The hours are never long;  
They care not when the tempests rise,  
Or snows of winter fall;  
Love fills for them the hidden skies,  
And lightens, brightens all!

The summer with each charming scene—  
Its wealth of roses sweet,  
Its shady groves and forests green,  
Its brooks that kiss their feet—  
Brings rapt'rous hours and lengthened days,  
But never days too long;  
Where hearts, though parted by their ways,  
To each are true and strong.

Each life may have its angry fates  
To follow and harass;  
And men prove false, with bitter hates,  
To meet them at each pass;  
Yet through them all the days shall glide,  
The hours seem never long,  
Where time and space fond hearts divide,  
And love is true and strong!

D. B. W.

**PARTY HYACINTH.—1.** Bright brown hair. Blue eyes or brown would match. 2. Quite tall enough. Hyacinth, "a purple flower;" *Lionel*, "lion-like;" *Hetty*, feminine of Henry, "rich at home;" *Barbara*, "a foreigner;" *Ethel*, "noble;" *Mabel*, "my beauty;" *Ralph*, "strong in heart;" *Nan*, "gracious." 3. Slovenly writing. 4. Most fully founded on facts in real life.

**K. C. M.**—It would be inadvisable for one so young—seventeen years to enter the married state, and you displayed rare good judgment in thus informing your ardent lover. Both can afford to wait for two years without any injury resulting to your love, and there is not the slightest doubt that such a stout-hearted girl, as we judge you to be, can very easily put up with the snubs of a crabbed aunt for such a short time.

**E. P.—1.** Taking for granted that you are a new reader, we are constrained to repeat that, under no circumstances, will addresses of any kind be furnished through this medium. There are, doubtless, booksellers in your wide-awake town who can furnish the book wanted, printers who will be happy to oblige you by printing the bill-heads desired, and a lawyer who will attend to the presentation of the patent claim.

**GEORGE.**—The lines referred to occur in Longfellow's "Psalm of Life." We quote the first stanza, as follows:

"Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem."

**TOM M.**—Fontainebleau, a town of France, is situated thirty-five miles south-east of Paris, in the midst of the forest to which it gives its name. It owes its chief celebrity to its royal chateau, a magnificent pile of various kinds of architecture, which has been the residence of several monarchs, and the scene of many historical events. Napoleon, who had signed there his abdication (April 11, 1814), bade farewell on the 20th to his old guard at the principal entrance of the palace, and he signed his second and final abdication there on June 22, 1815. The forest of Fontainebleau (area 41,000 acres), is one of the finest in France, and is adorned with statues, temples, lakes, waterfalls, and fountains.

**TOM.**—It is to be hoped your friend Mary will appreciate these lines:—

"Made for the high or low, although it be,  
A name could not be found more fitting thee;  
Ready for courtly dames, for poor ones meet,  
Yet even as thou art, divinely sweet."

**ANNIE.**—The first hospital in America was founded at Quebec by three nuns, in 1699. In 1717, the first hospital in the English colonies was opened at Boston, U.S., for persons sick with contagious diseases. The first army hospital in America was established at Cambridge, Mass., June 17, 1775. It was placed under the charge of Dr. John Warren.

**C. C. W.—1.** A man who will deliberately make love and propose marriage to two ladies can hardly expect any one to help him out of his dilemma. Instead of doing this we should be very happy to get the opportunity to warn these deluded females to shun his wiles. Act honourably and marry the first one to whom you made a proposal of marriage, who we feel sure loves you devotedly and will make a most exemplary helpmate. 2. Devote some of your leisure time to the practice of penmanship.

**A. H. H.**—That form of polygamy which permits a woman to have more than one husband is designated by the term polyandry, or polyandria. It is principally practiced in Tibet, where a wife commonly is the wife of a whole family of brothers—the older brother being the chief husband. In Oplon, one or two of the South Pacific Islands, the Aleutian Islands, among the Comacks and in several parts of Africa, this custom prevails to a great extent.

**E. L. L.**—According to a very ancient tradition, the Amazons were a nation of female warriors, who allowed no men to remain among them, but marched to battle under the command of a queen. The origin of this story is perhaps to be accounted for by supposing that vague descriptions, exaggerated and embellished, had reached the Greeks of the peculiar way in which the women of various Caucasian districts lived, performing military duties which elsewhere devolved upon men.

**G. R. S.**—"Siddle" will doubtless feel highly complimented by the following lines:—

"Sweet is her face, but sweeter still  
Is hers whose feature ne'er reflect  
Disdainful thoughts and passions ill;  
Decoit, with smiles so often decked,  
In her pure heart has found no place—  
E'en thus, men say of thy sweet face!"

**N. N.—1.** Ladies are not compelled to devote their whole attention to, and dance only with, the gentleman who have asked as their escorts to a ball or a dancing academy, and it is not at all likely that any well-bred man would be so selfish as to expect that he could thus monopolise the lady's company to the detriment of herself and her other male friends. On the contrary, he should be only too happy to allow some one else to share the honour of acting as her partner in the dance. 2. Quite up to the average, but a little practice will give it a more finished appearance.

**T. D.—1.** All wind is caused, directly or indirectly, by change of temperature. Suppose the temperature of two adjacent regions to become, from any cause, unequal, the air of the warmer, being lighter, will ascend and flow over on the other, while the heavier air of the colder region will flow in below to supply its place. Thus, then, a difference in the temperature of the two regions gives rise to two currents of air—one blowing from the colder to the warmer, along the surface of the earth, and the other from the warmer to the colder, in the upper strata of the atmosphere; and these currents will continue to blow until the equilibrium is restored.

**G. H. W.** Dictionaries of language are of modern origin, although glossaries of unusual words and phrases were in existence at a very early age in the world's history, the earliest work of the kind extant being the *Homeric Lexicon* of Apollonius, an Alexandrian grammarian of the time of Augustus, the famous Roman emperor. A real dictionary became first possible after the invention of printing, between 1450 and 1486. A Latin dictionary appeared in 1531, and one devoted to the Greek language in 1572. Previous to this discovery, and for some time after, the explanations of Latin words were given in Latin. The earliest printed vocabulary in which the words of any modern language answering to the Latin are inserted is the *Promptorium Pauperum*, published in 1493, in which English words are followed by their supposed Latin equivalents.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 287, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. XLVI., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. Spook; and Printed by WOODMAN and KINDEL, Milford Lane, Strand.